Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.

Year: 1975	SERMON TITLE	TEXT
January 5	"Give – and Take"	Matthew 7:1
January 12	"Colony Of Heaven"	Phillipians 3:20
January 26	"Give – And Take" – II	Matthew 7:1
February 2	"Whatever You Do –"	
February 9	"Divine Perspective"	Luke 9:28
February 16	"Life Is A 3-D Affair"	Luke 18:1
March 2	"I Am – The Good Shepherd"	John 10:11
March 9	"I Am – The Door	John 10
March 16	"I Am – The Bread Of Life"	John 6:42
March 30	"Follow the Leader" Easter Sunday	Matthew 28:7
April 6	"On Being Christ-Minded"	Phillipians 2:5
April 13	"How To Handle Loneliness"	John 16:32
April 20	"Learn By Living"	Genesis 5:27
April 27	Organ Dedication	Psalm 146:2
May 4	"About Prayer"	Matthew 6:7
May 11	"The Christian Home"	Proverb 27:5
May 18	"God Is Back –" Communion Meditation	
June 1	"In The Time Of Exodus"	Exodus 12:34
June 8	"A Towel In His Hand"	John 13:3-4
June 15	"About The Bible"	John 20:31
June 29	"Whose Are We"	1 John 3:2

1975- continued	*SERMON TITLE*	*TEXT*
July 6, 1975	"Except The Lord Build—"	
July 13, 1975	"To Change A World"	II Corinthians 5: 17
July 20, 1975	"Our Agonizing God"	Romans 8: 26-28
July 27, 1975	"According To God's Plans"	Romans 8: 14-39
August 3, 1975	"Case Study In How To Handle Yourself?	John 6: 1-15
August 17, 1975	"Acceptance Yourself" *or* "The You You happen To Be..."	Matthew 15: 21-28
August 24, 1975	"Case Study On How To Win Friends and Influence People"	John 1: 43-51
August 31, 1975	"Good Man Can Give Bad Advice"	Matthew 16; 23
September 28, 1975	"Beyond Impulse"	
October 19, 1975	"Prove It"	
October 26, 1975	"Stay Alert"	
November 2, 1975	"A Christian's View Of Death"	
November 9, 1975	"A Matter of Record"	
November 16, 1975	"—On Baptism"	
November 16, 1975	"In The Here And In The Now"	
November 23, 1975	"How It's Going To End"	
November 30, 1975	"If It's Tuesday It Must Be Belgium"	
December 7, 1975	"Signs of Hope"	Isaiah 1:9
December 14, 1975	"Return Engagement"	
December 21, 1975	"A Diet For The Soul"	Proverbs 15: 17
December 24, 1975	"Christmas Is Now"	
December 28, 1975	"The Difference Christmas Makes"	Matthew 2:11

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday After Christmas January 5, 1975

" GIVE - - AND TAKE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

The preacher last to stand at this sacred desk, today a week ago, directed our thoughts, and properly so, to the matter of New Year's resolutions. His sermon has triggered all kinds of thoughts in my mind since I heard it. And as I reflected upon it, I come to this sacred desk this morning to talk to you about the realm, perhaps, the area, in which some of us undoubtedly have made some New Year resolutions.

Presumably each one of us who has taken this matter seriously has decided that in 1975 he'd like to improve himself, he'd like to become a better person. Now closely related to that is the other area, the area of interpersonal relationships. In 1975 who among us would not like to master the art of getting along with other people?

Now we'd have no problem, of course we wouldn't, if everyone treated us the way we think we ought to be treated. But what can become as an alienating factor in some of our relationships is when people take us to task, quite bluntly -- when they criticize us. Now the title for this sermon is "Give - and Take" -- and the text: the words of our Blessed Lord recorded as the first verse of the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. Let me read it for you the way J. B. Phillips has put it down for us:

> "Don't criticize people, and you will not be criticized."

Now I dare say to you, had I been around when Jesus was preaching this sermon of which this text was a part, I think it would have caught me up short at that point, and I don't know that I would have gotten much of the rest of the sermon,

because there's something in this text that causes me to be hung up.

Now quite frankly, I don't mind telling you there are some passages of Scripture that are easier for me to believe than others. Now this may be true because I lack faith and I cannot fully understand what Scripture says, or it may be because of my lack of experience, and I cannot fully understand what the Bible is setting forth in front of us. But now as far as this text is concerned, if this is a valid translation, and I believe it to be:

"Don't criticize others and you will not be criticized"

.....it would have prompted me to stay after the sermon was over, and I think I would have been bold enough to go up to the Great Preacher, and as the crowd dwindled, I would have said, "Can I speak with you for a minute? I don't know that I agree with what you said - - I don't know that I fully understand it -- maybe I'm taking issue with it. You said, don't criticize others, and then they won't criticize you - - - I believe we are criticized whether we criticize other people or not! It isn't that we're criticized only because we criticize people.....it seems to be the nature of all of us who are given to criticize people. It happens to be a fact of life. So I take issue with the text: 'Don't criticize people and then they won't criticize you' - - I say to you, it's the obstacle course of life that each of us runs. Each of us is going to be criticized at one time or another, whether we criticize other people or not."

And that's why I particularly appreciate what someone has said. Let me read for you the direct quotation:

> "Gently, or roughly, kindly, or cruelly, the critics will have their shot at you. It may be your inferiors, your equals, your superiors. It could be your family, your neighbors, your boss, your public,

your rivals. Or if you are in business, your customers. Somebody is sure to think that you are less than perfect and will not mind telling you so . . . "

Now I want this sermon to be as helpful as it can possibly be, if you don't mind. So I want to talk about with you for a little while, this whole matter of how to handle criticism, how to take it.

Now relax, I'm not coming to this sacred desk this morning fresh from an onslaught of criticism with which I have had to deal this week. I'm not giving vent to my frustrations or my hostilities -- please relax at that point. But what I am hoping to say to you comes out of the overflow of what these years, I think, and I say it humbly, have taught me. And perhaps a thing or two that has occurred to me as I try to remind myself of them, may hold you in good stead.

I think you ought to know that it's not easy for preachers to take criticism. Preachers are artists-of-sorts, and artists are not given to taking criticism easily. There's another reason why we are not given to taking criticism easily, is because most of you people are so polite, you're so kindly considerate of us. The sermon is preached, the preacher stands at the door, he shakes your hand.....you feel constrained to say some good thing. You don't want to hurt the preacher's feelings -- really, this is the way you handle most of us.

I'm thinking particularly of the dear old lady who came to church, and every Sunday she was constrained to say some good thing to the preacher as she shook his hand at the door. And one Sunday it was a terrible sermon -- honestly, it was awful.....and when she shook his hand at the door, constrained to say some good thing, she said, "Pastor, that was a wonderful text!"

I know a Synod President who tells me that if a preacher does get a nervous breakdown, one of the reasons may be for it, just one of the reasons may be, is

because he's never learned how to handle criticism. He's just never learned hot to take it. Do you see how I'm taking you into my confidence this morning?

They tell me, not that I'm athletically inclined, but I learn a bit from those who know something about athletics, that one of the first things that a football coach will do when he meets his men for the first time, if he's a good coach, he will teach them how to fall, how to handle a tackle. Invariably they're going to be tackled . . . invariably there's going to be an obstacle in the course that they run. Life is like that! Invariably somebody's going to tackle, whatever the degree, and we do well to learn how to take it.

Now let me suggest several ground rules, if you don't mind.

The first one is this: When criticism does come your way, listen -- take time to bring it some attention...for one purpose, to find out first of all if there is any truth to it. And then if there's any truth to it, decide to do something about it -- that's the second step.

> ...none of us, you see, is qualified to run his course through life being his own best critic. And as we run our course through life we will encounter other people who may take it upon themselves as a sacred obligation to criticize us. And when that happens, listen to it, and see if there's any truth in it.

This sermon as it develops will become increasingly transparent to you, if you don't mind, that is, I will become increasingly transparent. In my early years among you -- I've forgotten whether it was the third, fourth or fifth year now -- there was a member of this congregation who came to me and criticized my preaching. I want to say to you, I'm glad he did. It caused me to reflect, to evaluate some things that I had rather become reckless regarding it. Now here again, be patient with me and don't misunderstand me, if in the last few years you've detected any measure of improvement in my

preaching, I owe that man a great deal of credit because of it. Now this might not have happened if I had gone immediately on the defensive and refused to look for the truth that was inherent in his criticism . . .

> - - Abraham Lincoln (you remember it, don't you) was told by another cabinet member that Staunton (he was his Secretary of War, wasn't he?) had said of Abraham Lincoln, he was a fool. How did Abraham Lincoln respond? Grand and good and noble man that he was, Lincoln simply said: "Well Staunton is a wise man, and if Staunton calls me a fool, I'd better look into it."

Ground Rule Number One: When criticism comes your way, listen - - if only to discover what element of truth can be found in it.

Second Ground Rule: Decide at once to profit by it, and to make the most of this encounter that you had. Say to yourself that you will mature in the process now that's beginning to develop. Decide to improve your situation because of it. And if you can possibly do this, as part of the criticism that has come your way, learn to appreciate the role of the person who has done the criticizine! It takes a bit of courage on the part of someone to criticize us. It takes an unbounded measure of love on the part of an honest person to criticize us.

Frankly, I'm troubled at this point. I don't know how to put it -- there are some people I feel I ought to rebuke. There are some people I feel that maybe in God's plan in my relationship with that person, I should become the chastening instrument. But I hesitate, and I waver, because I'm not so sure that that person knows how to handle it and that that person will allow our relationships to improve because of it. That's a lamentable thing to have to admit. As part of this second Ground Rule I suggest to you that when criticism does

come your way, you learn to profit by it to the extent that you can empathize with other people who are being criticized.

> - - That grand and good man who had a noble influence on my life from the days when I first went to Camp Nawakwa, all through college, all through Seminary -- the man who performed the wedding ceremony for Winifred and me when we were married, the man who cradled in the crook of his arm our two sons and named them for Jesus Christ, Head of the Department of Practical Theology at Gettysburg Seminary, Harvey Daniel Hoover.....I used to drive the distance from South Williamsport, Pennsylvania to Gettysburg just to spend a half hour with him and to unload before him the brunts of the burdens that he was carrying in my first parish. I sought out his wise counsel based upon his years of experience that came from his pastor's heart.
>
> ...and when he would counsel me, then it seemed that somewhere in the conversation he'd tell me about some of the things he had to carry - - some of the downright untruthful and unmerciful things that people had said about that big man with the gracious spirit. I learned, carrying the brunt of my criticism, to have a measure of empathy for him and others.

Ground Rule Number Three, if you don't mind: When criticism comes your way, don't collapse under it -- face it rather boldly -- take it on the chin, and then remember that even in the Apostles' Creed we say something about coming to the end of our days, the end of our years, facing Him who will be the Judge of the living and the dead, and none of us is ever going to escape the critical

eye of Him who is Lord and Giver of Life, even Jesus Christ himself. And remember that as you receive the brunt of criticism, that one day you'll plead for mercy, at the hand of Him whose eye is the most critical of all eyes.

Another Ground Rule: Be big enough to take the criticism, if not for your own sake, then for the sake of the person who does the criticizing. Now you never thought of it that way, did you? We're all caught up on this thing together, whether we're the criticized or the ones who do the criticizing. Now I've learned enough from human nature to know that there are some people who simply have to get it off their chest. There are some people who have to blow the lid. Now if you're caught up in that, and your're being criticized, try to be big enough to let that person give vent to his feelings. It could be -- and this is a risk worth taking -- it could be that once that is done, the situation from that point on could begin to improve.

> ...my father was that kind of a person. It was worth all the blast and the fury for the improved relationship that came when you began to pick up the pieces.....together.

The temptation, of course, is always to fight back. We become infuriated, when we're criticized, and then we're prone to criticize them. I say to you quite frankly, two wrongs don't make a right - - two hates don't make a love!

Now the last Ground Rule, if I may offer it to you: Cushion the shock of criticism with a bit of humor, a bit of honesty and a bit of grace. This is not easy to do. I wish that I had mastered this when I needed it most. Now please, at some risk now, remember I have been your Pastor for nineteen years. You ought to know me by this time. Remember how I tell you this...

...some years back when there was thrust upon me the most grievous burden that I think I've carried as a Pastor of a congregation, a man came into my office here at the church and dressed me down -- took issue with me on a number of

things. The upshot was that he told me in no uncertain way that this parish was too big for me and I ought to think seriously of resigning. Now listen to me carefully. I happen to love this parish, and I think with whatever strength God gives me I try to give you a day's work. And I was working harder then, at that point of my life, than I had ever worked before. Now I am laying bare my soul to you. My immediate reaction: I was infuriated! And I was fighting back!-- but to no avail. He's a wise man who says, when you're criticized, don't try to defend yourself, because if it's true, you don't have to be the defender, and if it's false, you have no defense! But I blundered that day, and I rue it ever since.

Upon reflection, I think the day would have been saved for both of us if one of us, and perhaps I, could have displayed a bit of humor and grace and honesty. What I should have said, when he told me the parish was too big for me and I ought to resign, I should have said: "Sit down, brother! Talk softly! Let's not get this out! Let's not have too many other people thinking this way! I've been thinking this way for a long time, and now you've found it out - - ! Let's just keep it to ourselves!" ...maybe that's the way I should have talked. Maybe I should have said this: "I think part of your statement I agree with completely. This parish is too big for me. That's why I'm praying harder now than I've ever prayed in my life -- that's why I'm reaching out to certain people in this parish for spiritual strength and comfort and courage as I never did before. You're absolutely right, it is too big for me!"

I say to you quite candidly, I've benefited by that, I think. I look back, and if I had it to do over again, I don't know that I would have asked God to eradicate that painful chapter. It did come, and for heaven's sake, just because I'm speaking so frankly to you about criticism today, don't you make a field day of it, and take advantage of me. I suppose the wit was right when he said: Criticism will come your way, you can't stop it, but you might begin by removing some of the causes for it. Now that's something to think about it.

Well, I'm sorry to admit to you that this sermon's been only half preached. It bears the title: "Give - and Take." One day maybe I can come back to this sacred desk and talk to you about the other aspect of criticism -- How to dish it out -- how to give it! Because it does become the Christian to criticize!

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The First Sunday After Epiphany- Anniversary Sunday January 12, 1975

"COLONY OF HEAVEN"

O GOD, For every congregation that has gathered in Thy Name known as Saint Luke Church in Silver Spring, we're grateful; wherever they have met in the passing of these years we likewise give thanks; for each of those pastors, worthy men of God, who in years gone by stood up and proclaimed to the waiting people the truth and the love of Jesus Christ. May it happen again, and happen now. Amen.

There's something to be said for asking fanciful questions. Last Sunday night a small group of us had supper together, and after we had eaten we gave ourselves to what one ought to give himself occasionally more often than he usually does -- to profitable conversation. And in the course of the conversation someone suggested: Suppose you were free to be some other person of whom you've known or whom you've known, who has lived within this century -- whom would you prefer to be? What characteristics, what traits, what attributes in that person's life would you prefer to have in your life? Such an exercise can be highly beneficial, you see.....

-- It could indicate a great deal about yourself, to say nothing of the measure of appreciation that you have for some other worthy person....

There's a great deal to be said for asking fanciful questions. Suppose you were to be assigned this exercise -- if you could choose to have been alive in some other era, other than this present one, when would you like most to have lived?.....or, if you're past 45 and beyond, how about posing this question: What do you think is the optimum age?

- - now I know it's said: "Grow old along with me, the best of life is yet to be" - - that's alright, if you can continue to be mentally alert and without physical infirmity. But come now, what would

you say is an optimum age?

For our purpose this morning, marking the 35th anniversary of this congregation, I am about to suggest to you that there's a great deal to be said for age thirty-five. Now withhold your opinion, think what you want to to yourself, you could or could not agree. Some of us who are beyond thirty-five wouldn't for the minute want to shift into reverse and go back to it. And maybe there are some of you who are not yet in your thirties who are not so sure that you'd like to take a short-cut and find yourself suddenly catapaulted into the mid-period of a fourth decade. But I suggest to you, there is a great deal to be said for thirty-five as an optimum age.

Look at it this way: by the time one is thirty-five he should have learned a thing or two. The maturation process surely should have set in. By the time he's thirty-five he does have a bit of history behind him. He has traveled some distance, and profitably so. By the time he's thirty-five he's still eager to face what lies ahead, and perhaps could be at that very fine period in life where his productive capabilities still have a fresh quality. At thirty-five a man isn't tired, granted he's taken care of himself. And at thirty-five a man has a great deal for which yet to live. So suppose we accept the premise -- phrase it any way you want to, but for our purpose let's say there is a great deal to be said for having reached one's 35th year...

...what has gone before can now stand as a supportive arm. He's gathered a measure of strength, and as he faces the future he's beckoned by it, and wouldn't think for a single minute of retreating or withdrawing.

Now....can we apply that premise to this congregation? I'd like to believe that we can. I'd like to believe at thirty-five that we've gathered some strength, and I'd like to believe at thirty-five years of age we can still be excited about what lies ahead. And even if we don't know what it is that lies ahead, we can

still be excited about the fact that we ought to be moving in a certain direction. Now to serve our purpose there's a text for this sermon, as well there ought to be -- the text that's drawn from the mind and spirit of a man who had a very warm spot in his heart for young congregations. He was, if you please, the original Milton J. Bieber who did his share of hop - skip-and-jump across Asia Minor and gathered Christians together and met with them and started new congregations.....and then moved on to another place. But he'd still keep in touch with them, and he was wolt to write them letters. He has a whole string of letters to his credit, we call them Epistles -- the Epistles of a man named Paul.

And one such congregation that still occupied his warm spot in his heart was that group of Christians who lived in Phillipi. So he wrote them a letter. And I suppose he might have been thinking about some anniversary in their life in which he wanted them to assess very clearly in their own minds as to who they were and what they were meant to be. In that 20th verse of the 3rd chapter of that Letter he says to them -- and I'll give you a free translation:

> "Do you people really know who you are? I'll tell you what you are -- you're a colony of Heaven! You're meant to be God's outposts here on earth. You're meant to be his called, selected, special representatives."

Well, there's a figure of speech for you. I'd like to say as we look back over these thirty-five years of Saint Luke Church, it's an apt descriptive for this congregation. I'd like to believe that we can say very properly, Saint Luke Lutheran Church, Silver Spring, Maryland is an outpost of God's.

A person ought to know who he is and what he's meant to be. There are those who tell us that the real crisis of our civilization is really a crisis of identity. We just don't know who we are -- that's what people tell us -- and until we know who we are we don't know where we're meant to go! ow what we're

meant to do! or how we're meant to accept the treatment that we get!

One of those sad lines from "The Death of a Salesman" is when Willie's sons gather around the grave, and one of them says about Willie words to this effect, I can't give the direct quotation: "What a pity - he never really knew who he was!" I'd like to submit to you that this congregation after thirty-five years has no question about its identity - - it knows exactly who it is! and what it's meant to be here on earth, and that descriptive "A Colony of Heaven" I'd like to say fits us.

Now in order to better appreciate it, do you mind if I give you a bit of historical perspective as to just how you happen to get that figure of speech from the Apostle Paul. Well you'll have to remember that this is the time of the Roman Empire. Now try to imagine this - - try to picture this in your mind. It is absolutely astounding. At the time of the Roman Empire, when it was at its height, it stretched all the way from the North Sea to the Sahara Desert, all the way from the Atlantic Ocean to the Euphrates River.

Now this empire had been established by a show of force. You can dominate by armies. But there's a time comes when it needs to be held together and you can't rely upon force. Now those Romans were very clever people. I'll tell you exactly their strategy.....in order to hold the empire together and to keep this imprimatur, the stamp of Rome upon it, they had recruited very carefully certain people, and then placed them down strategically at certain places of the empire, and they said,"Now you live here as a little colony of Romans. You must never forget who you are. You must always keep in touch with your home base, you must live and walk among these other people according to the standards of Rome itself."

....they succeeded so well that after a period of time some of the people in the provinces took on the basic traits and characteristics of the Roman citizens and they themselves applied for Roman citizenship and were

granted it.

Now I'd like to think that God is saying to us in Saint Luke Church -- "You're to be my special people, you're to be my recruits. You're to be my chosen ones, put down as an outpost in suburbia!" You may not be willing to accept this at first blush, but I'm willing to suggest that if we had a survey made, we might have to accept the fa-t that there are more people in suburbia in an area such as Silver Spring who get up in the morning and never so much as touch base with God, never so much as look in His direction and to realize that they belong to Him and they are meant to live as His citizens here on earth, and to embrace the virtues that become the children of God. There are more people who don't do that than people who do. And yet this is God's world, and God loves it, and God says, "It belongs to me, and I'm not going to give up my hold on it - - but to see that my purposes will be accomplished, I will count on certain people and I'll establish them as little colonies, so that when they come together they can reflect my way, my truth and live according to my standards.

Now if you were to ask me what Saint Luke Church has been up to for thirty-five years, I'd say for thirty-five years she's kept herself as a Colony of Heaven, in which people are drawn together and then re-oriented as they have been re-established as they've touched base with the homeland.....and then gone out to live in the community of which they are a part as citizens of Heaven.

Now a great deal has happened in these thirty-five years. The pressures of the times, the turmoil and the unsettlement. It's been a changing scene. But one thing has remained constant. Every time, I would like to believe, the people of this congregation have come together, they've come together for the purpose of touching base with the homeland -- trying to look in the direction of their Supreme Commander -- trying to recall the tradition that's being super-

imposed upon them by the grace of God -- look at it that way! And then going out and exemplifying those virtues in the midst of a pagan society.

From my vantage=point I look back and I think how constantly, as the people of Saint Luke Church gather together they had recalled for them a religious reading of life. The God-factor was always being introduced. You know one of the terrible things that's happened to us in recent times: that we suffer from despair. We become too cynical, and for the first time in our history we have a generation of young people who on occasion have been characterized as cynical. I don't think that has ever happened before. Mark Twain could be cynical - - let me read for you what he once wrote about life:

> " . . . a myriad more are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over one another. Age creeps upon them; infirmities follow. Those they love are taken away from them; until at length ambition is dead, pride is dead, and the longing for release comes in its place. It comes at last - - the only unsolicited guest earth ever had for them . . . "
>
> said Mark Twain
>
> " . . . and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence."

To that kind of thinking Saint Luke Church for over thirty-five years as it represents the Colony of Heaven has said, This is true! As a people they have been confronted by each preacher who has stood before them in their encounter with God to say, "I protest against such thinking." Life is meaningful because we have been redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb.

Do not permit yourself to believe that you are of no consequence. You are the sons of God, you are important to Him, and you are important to one another. You are important to a world that needs what you have to offer.

This morning one of the first people I greeted before the 8:30 hour, not a member of this parish, who attends with some degree of regularity. He said,

"Today is your 35th anniversary, isn't it?" . . . "Yes." . . . "Well, I've read some things about your church, but let me add one thing that I've not seen in print: it gives me a lift each morning when I'm in the car pool and come by at 7:00 o'clock, Monday through Friday, to see your flags flying."

...it triggered a thought in my mind. In company with some of you who have traveled in other places - - I remember that trip around the world, other trips abroad before and since -- how when I'd visit this corner of the capital city or that corner of the capital city, they'd point out to me, this is the British Chancery....this is the Norwegian Embassy..... I remember once in that tiny Kingdom of Nepal being upon the place where the People's Republic of China had its embassy....

.....and there was its flag flying. I remember how in different places on the face of this earth I've seen the flags of different nations flying. And now I reflect: within that compound which was their Chancery or their Embassy, they reflected the traditions of the homeland -- they were the ones who were always keeping in touch with the home base. And then when they went out into the community where they happened to live, what the Nepalese knew about the People's Republic of China they knew because of the Chinese who lived among them. Apply that yardstick to any nation that's represented in another country. . . .

. . . Saint Luke Church keeps its flags flying as its people, Sunday after Sunday, turn their backs upon this place, their colonial compound, and go out into the world and make their impression in the name of Jesus Christ. Now that's what we have been doing in the past. We ought to gather strength from it. I have to say, if you were to ask me, What does the future hold? -- some of us have some idea of a new challenge. And if ever we ought to be able to face a greater day, never at any other time in our history are we better prepared to do it. Keep this in mind, will you, as the future unfolds.

* * * (Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday After The Epiphany January 26, 1975

"GIVE AND TAKE" - II

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The sermon today is a follow up on that sermon which was preached several weeks ago on the general subject of CRITICISM. The title for that sermon several weeks ago was simply "GIVE AND TAKE" and it was intended when that sermon was being preached that it would have been a balanced sermon, dealing with both hot to take criticism as well as how to give it. But time, as you may remember, ran out on us, and we never did get around to much talking about hot to give criticism. Now that's the purpose of this sermon this morning.

If Dr. Kenneth Foreman could say, somewhat to our caution as well as to our comfort: "Gently or roughly, kindly or cruelly, the critics will have their shots at you. It may be by your inferiors, your equals or your superiors. It may be by your family, your boss, your public, your rivals, your customers. Somebody is sure to think that you are less than perfect and will not mind telling you so. . . "

. . . now if Dr. Foreman can say this, then I think I can just as surely say to you that each of us holds in his own hand the shooting gun of criticism, readily aimed and all set to trigger.

We do criticize. To the day that we die undoubtedly we'll go on criticizing people. If we were to turn this session together as we come now for an encounter with God in this place into an old-fashioned testimonial meeting, we

might be surprised by the number of people who would stand up and confess to the amount of criticizing that they've already done today!

-- the people who criticize other members of their family for being late and not getting ready in time, at least to their liking, to get off to church on schedule.....

-- criticizing perhaps the way the teenager drove the car on the way to church this morning....

...only God knows how much of criticism has taken place already this morning before you came to this place.

Now I am in duty bound to remind you, as well I should at the very beginning, that this sermon has a text, as all sermons should have, and the text is recorded in the 7th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, the first verse -- Phillips translates it this way:

"You will be judged by the way you criticize others."

Now that isn't something that I've conjured up this morning, taking my own defence against people who take pot-shots at me -- heaven forbid! -- I don't drag into this pulpit my own frustrations, nor should I feed a congregation with them! This text happens to be the word of our Blessed Lord, and I ask that you give it earnest heed because sometimes we forget that there will be a Day of Judgment. Sometimes we forget it because we want to forget it. We don't want to think that eventually we will stand in front of the Lord Jesus Christ, and as we stand in front of Him He'll draw a dividing line, on one side, to use His figure of speech, will be sheep....and on the other side will be goats - - on which side of the dividing line that He draws will be those condemned to outer darkness, as He puts it, and those on the other side will go to be with their Heavenly Father. I am constrained to remind you that there is such a thing as Judgment.

I am constrained to call to your attention that every time we Lutherans come

together for an encounter in God's House, among other things we stand and recite the words of an ancient Creed in which we refer to the truth that Jesus will come again, and when He comes again He will judge - - none of us will escape it..... that's basic Scriptural Christian teaching. The text this morning reminds us that when He judges us, He will take into account the way we criticize other people.

Let's ask the question: Why do we criticize? Now don't come back at once at me and say, just because we're human. That answer is a true one, of course, but it can also be an escapist attitude, as though we can be excused from it. I think we can validate some of the reasons why we criticize and go beyond the point of saying, well it's just human to do it.

> - - sometimes we criticize because we have such a passion for what is right, and we're offended by people who fall short, that we're quick to respond and to react -- by their misdemeanor or their misbehavior -- that we're inclined at once to speak our piece, because something that we cherish and something that we uphold is being either ignored or being abused....

...this is one reason why we criticize, and in our criticizing of other people, condemn.

There's another reason why I think we criticize, because we feel that we're not giving earnest attention to what's going on unless we respond as soon as we can. I am impressed as you are with - - say the President of the United States makes a major address . . . no sooner does his face fade from the television screen until there looms in front of us the commentator or the panel of experts who make a living, we say by commenting -- but that's the other term for criticizing.....no sooner does the man, the journalist, the reporter, the newspaperman, get the advance copy but what he sits down immediately to put to work his critical interpretation of what's about to be said. And we think that we're

less than involved, we're less than concerned, unless we exercise the role of the critic. I think that's one reason why we criticize, because we want people to know that we do pay attention, and that on the basis of what we know and our own experience, we have something to say, constructive or otherwise.

I think there is another reason why we criticize. We criticize sometimes because we're rather proud of our virtues. We permit ourselves to believe that we're in a position to pass judgment, and so from our vantage-point of having accumulated some merit, we don't hesitate to speak our piece because of our righteous -- self-righteous attitude, that is. Not a very commendable reason, honestly now.

And would you believe it, there's still another reason that some of us might be able to say we criticize, because we're not as virtuous as we'd like to be, and just because we're not as good as we'd like to be, we criticize other people because in calling attention to their weaknesses we focus attention away from our weaknesses.

I once knew a woman who was very good at this. It was almost an obsession with her, to be forever talking about the faults and weaknesses of others, and she gained a measure of security in doing so because all the while she was doing it she was deliberately focusing your attention away from her weaknesses to the weaknesses of somebody else.

Now let's stop at this point and ask the question: Since we do criticize, and for whatever reason we may validate our criticizing of people, is there such a thing as Christian criticism? - - which is simply to ask the question: Dare a Christian criticize other people? Well, as always we go to the example of our Blessed Lord or His followers. Did you pay attention to that second Lesson that was read today - - the Apostle Paul was criticizing a congregation for being less than what they should have been....there was dissention among them, and he says, "Dissension does not become the community of Christ."

As I read the pages of the New Testament, the Gospels in particular ---- now brace yourself for this! -- I become increasingly impressed by the amount of time that Jesus spent in criticizing people. Not that He was obsessed with the role of a fault-finder, but He did expend a great deal of His energy in telling people what was wrong. So I suggest to you this morning that there is such a thing as Christian criticism, and there are times when a Christian is in duty bound to criticize. So maybe it isn't so much the question, should I or should I not criticize? as it is: How should I criticize? How should I dish it out? How should I lay it on the line? - - - what is the manner that becomes the Christian?

I want this sermon to be as helpful to you as I want it to be to myself, and I'm going to suggest certain guidelines now.

One is this: When a Christian criticizes, let him always criticize within the context of love, for love is the supreme virtue of the Christian. It is the distinguishing characteristic. Said Jesus Christ, "This is my commandment that I give to you, that you love . . "

Now let me give you my own personal definition of love: To love is to meet the need of another person.....which is simply now to suggest that when you criticize, criticize with the understanding as a Christian that you want to meet a need in that person's life, and in the spirit of love you offer that criticism.

It's not easy for some of us. Some of us speak our piece because we have hostile feelings -- not a gracious attitude -- but because we're embittered, or hurt, we have been crushed. Then we justify laying the other person low. The basic guideline for a Christian when he criticizes is always that it's done within the context of love.

The second guideline that I might suggest to you is that when you're inclined to criticize, hold your fire until you've amassed perhaps as many of the facts as

you can. And wise indeed is that person who when he is prone to criticize, gives the other person a chance to give his view of the situation before you speak. It's always a salutary thing, all other things being equal, to have somebody else size up the situation from his point of view.

I took myself to task last night. I happened to be viewing a certain television presentation -- I came on midway in the program, and I thought to myself, why in heaven's name have they ever cast that woman? -- why have they invited her to speak? There was something about her manner that irritated me. And then I was absolutely brought up short and suffered a measure of chagrin when I learned as the program concluded that she has only four months to live. She was speaking as a dying woman. Hold your fire, my friend, until you have all the facts before you....then you're in a better position to offer criticism.

A third guideline, if you don't mind: Offer it as tactfully as you can. Tact in this sense is just another word for being gracious. I can give you several examples, I suppose, - - only one will suffice for the moment. I have a brother-in-law who says that you might come upon a woman who has unattractive facial features, but you don't walk up to her and say, "You have a face that would stop a clock." - - but rather you could say, "When I look into your face, time stands still!" . . .

. . . and yet I'm inclined to suggest to you that I have a friend who also says, ten years of being tactful can also make you a liar, and I don't know which is the greater sin.

But on the other hand, et me go on and suggest to you that there is such a thing as timing in offering criticism. Be very careful about this. There are some times when the last thing in the world that you want to do is to lay another person low -- it just isn't the right time. And maybe as over against that you and I must master the art of preparing ourselves to offer the criticism, which is

also to say that maybe we need to prepare the other person for the criticism that we're going to offer. Attitude and approach are both very, very important, because you mustn't forget that when a Christian criticizes, he criticizes because he wants to help the person and he wants to see the situation improved. That's the only justification for Christian criticism -- that the situation might be improved.

It's a shame that all of us can't begin life with at least twenty years of experience. Ellen, I'd like to believe that I'm a better grandfather than I was a father. For the years have taught me when I look back, that there were times when I should not have hounded, when I should, to use the old farmer's expression, "slackened the reins" - for those of you who could appreciate that, it means simply: "Let up a bit." There are times when you ought to skip a day or a week in hounding the kid who doesn't keep his room as tidy as you'd like to have it kept. There are times, I presume, when the person who is being criticized is justified in turning and saying, "For once would you get off my back!" Maybe there are times when we have to hold our fire and we have to wait a bit, bearing in mind always that when a Christian criticizes, he criticizes with the hope that the situation might improve. You will be judged -- honestly -- by the way we criticize others.

Jean Paul Satre said: "Hell is other people" -- meaning of course that they irritated him, they annoyed him -- it would be a lot better if they weren't around. But they are around. And they're not always exactly as we would like them to be -- and we're not always exactly as others would like us to be.

And the final word about criticizing, the last guideline is this: that when we criticize, we criticize as one sinner to another. Which means we don't criticize proudly -- we may come down heavily but we come down as those who are humbled in the sight of God.....now you think about these things, even as I've given myself the same assignment.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Presentation of Our Lord February 2, 1975

"WHATEVER YOU DO - - "

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Let me begin this sermon by asking you a question, a question perhaps that you didn't expect me to raise. The question is simply this: Tell me honestly, where do you expect to find God tomorrow morning?

There is no question in my mind but what some of you did come here today expecting to find God. We make much of the fact that occasionally when the announcements are made -- well it goes something like this: that there are some of us who keep marking the path that leads to this place because we honestly believe that here it's made easier to think the thoughts of God. . .

. . we call this God's House

. . we refer to every one of you as God's people

. . we refer to this day as the Lord's Day

. . we refer to this sermon as the preaching of God's Word

. . we refer to the anthems and the hymns as the singing of God's praise ....so there's no question about it presumably, that you've come here today expecting to find God. But where do you expect to find God tomorrow morning? Only a very few of you who are present right now will be showing up here, for understandable reasons, tomorrow morning.

Some years back, I remember it well, the Roman Catholic Church experimented in France with what they called the "Worker - Priest Movement." I remember so well when I first took that trip to Europe, when for two-and-a-half months we were studying spiritual values in Western Europe culture, we arranged to

have a distinguished Jesuit, the editor of the largest newspaper of its kind in the Roman Catholic Church in France, speak to us. And those twenty-some years ago he said to us that he looked upon France as a pagan country, that the necessity and the intensity so great for the Christian witness that would match perhaps the same intensity and necessity that we give it when we send it to some folk in so-called foreign lands. In order to bring a creative thrust to the witness in Christ's name, the Roman Catholic Church allowed priests to work in industry, not to wear their clerical garb but to wear the garb of a worker, in the machine shop, the factory, the textile plant.

An American pastor heard about this and so he made a trip to France and he said to a worker-priest, "Tell me, how do you do it? I'd like to introduce God to American industry."

I don't know how God would feel when somebody makes a remark like that. Dare we honestly believe that we are so insensitive to what God is that He has to be introduced to <u>any</u> part of His Kingdom over which He thinks that He already has dominion and sovereignty? Tell me, are you numbered among those who make a mistake in believing that God is to be found <u>only among those who</u> gather in a particular place at a particular time on a particular day for a particular purpose?

Don't get me wrong - - I make much of that myself, but I don't want to ever succumb to the error of entitling any one of you to believe that this is the only place where God is to be found...or that God is to be sensed....or we're to be made aware of God only when we talk about religious things. Archbishop Temple, that grand and noble soul of England of a decade or so ago, was absolutely right when he shocked some people, some distinguished Church leaders, when he said that God has a lot of other things in which He's interested beside religion. Tell me, where do you expect to find God -- tomorrow?

Monday - Tuesday - Wednesday - Thursday - Friday - Saturday - ?

You ought to know why I've come to this sacred desk to speak to you in this vein today. The text has been on my mind for some time. But the appreciation for the text was triggered anew when the other evening I listened over a local TV channel to a special program in which some of the mayors who have been in conference in Washington were asked to speak. I listened to each of them in turn, and I think it was the Mayor of Detroit who said something to this effect: "You are wrong if you believe that Detroit is an exception. Sure the commentators bring you the bad news - - so many laid off at Chrysler...so many laid off at Ford.....so many laid off at General Motors. But maybe we're no different than any other part of the country. For joblessness and unemployment is a national problem . . . " And we're talking a great deal about it, you know. It's the one thing that seems to occupy our time more than anything else except perhaps inflation. With apologies to Gertrude Stein -- "A job is a job, is a job, is a job . . " But a job is never more so perhaps than when there isn't a job.

Unfortunately, those of us who live in the metropolitan area of the Nation's Capital are immunized to a degree. For the most part Government employees have a measure of security and job stability -- for the most part. But out throughout the face of this land there are people whose life-style has to be definitely altered because they have been laid off and they have no assurance when they might be hired again.

Now I haven't come to this sacred desk this morning to ask that you become especially sensitive to unemployment or to share the grief of those who suffer because of it. But I have come this morning to ask you how long it's been since you've considered all over again the basic Christian philosophy regarding work. I make bold to suggest to you that the big thing as far as the Christian is

concerned, when he thinks of his day's work, is not how much he earns. There are some people who go into a particular line of work because of the remuneration they can expect....there are some people who change vocations because they have reason to believe that this vocation might pay better than the other. With all the strength that I can command, while in these days we talk about the fact that people are being laid off and there is no salary check expected - - from the Christian standpoint, difficult as it may be to appreciate this now, the big thing about a day's work is not essentially the check that comes at the end of the period.

There are some misconceptions about work to which the Christian ought always to address himself. That's one of them.

The second is this: That unless a man happens to be doing church work, he's not really doing holy work, work that's especially pleasing to God. The Church, you know, makes mistakes. The Church makes mistakes because it's made up of people such as you and me. I don't know for how many centuries the Church went on allowing people to believe that unless someone became a priest -- that is, a monk or a sister in a convent, or a missionary -- unless someone became a candidate for Holy Orders, he just wasn't doing God's work!

Bless Martin Luther's soul, he came along and spelled the lie to that. It's one of the great blessings that came with the Protestant Reformation. It was Martin Luther who's supposed to have said that a shoe-repairman who takes care of shoes and does his job well, does a work as sacred in the sight of God as the priest who stands with folded hands before the altar. So it's a misconception regarding work if you think you are not doing work pleasing in God's sight unless you happen to be a candidate for Holy Orders.

It's also a misconception regarding work, as far as the Christian is

concerned, that it's the Lord's work only when you can give special attention to it, and by that I mean a special amount of your time. There are some folks who are always thinking that later on they will be able to do the Lord's work .....but in the meantime God's giving you health and strength, and a brain - - is He no less exacting from you now?

You know very well, my friend, that Jesus Christ lived to the age of 33 - - only three years of that period was spent in preaching, and teaching. From twelve to thirty, what was He doing then? We have reason to believe that He was a carpenter, working ankle-deep in wood shavings...fitting a lintel, easing a yoke around the oxen's neck.....handling a hammer and a saw -- for eighteen years! - - thirty years of age when He preached His first sermon! Was He less than optimum to God up until the age of thirty? It's a misconception that we have regarding work, from a Christian's standpoint, if we allow ourselves to believe that it has to be done in a special relationship to religion as we think of it in an institutionalized sense.

Some of you have been to that very fine building on Riverside Drive in New York City where there's a wood carving. It has the faces of at least 19 different people, who represent 19 different walks of life. And each, I dare say, represents a kind of a halo. And underneath are inscribed these words, which constitute the text for today's sermon:

"Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God . . "

....and only one out of those 19 depicted there happens to be a preacher!

You are to be commended that you've come here to find God. I should be disappointed indeed as one charged with the responsibility of the worship service if you did not have that encounter. If I know the mind of God aright, and if I know the mind of a waiting world, they will be shortchanged if come Monday morning God cannot be experienced in the market place...in your office.... on the street where you live.

And at this point let me quote for you that famous paragraph of George McLeod in which he talks about where a Christian should be giving evidence of what he believes: "I simply argue that the cross be raised up again at the center of the market place as well as on the steeple of the church. I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves; on the town garbage heap; at a crossroads so cosmopolitan that they had to write his title in Hebrew, in Latin, in Greek - - ; at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, and thieves curse, and soldiers gamble. Because that is where He died. And that is what He died about. And that is where churchmen should be and what churchmen should be about . . "

Pleasing in the sight of God is the fact that you should come here to find Him today. The echo of the voice from Heaven, so it seems to me, is this: "Am I to be lost then, for six days?"

....only you have the answer to that question.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"DIVINE PERSPECTIVE"

QUIET our minds and hush our souls,
O God, and make us ready for what
is about to follow. Through Jesus
Christ Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Last evening, as he and I are wont to do on occasion, the Assistant Pastor and I spent a few quiet moments in this empty church. We do it by deliberate design, to condition ourselves for what God expects from us as together we minister to you on the Lord's Day - - wittingly or unwittingly to try to adjust our thinking as to what may be your frame of mind when you come to God's House and have this divine encounter, the like of which does not occur anywhere else.

As we walked from this place shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, he reflected on the fact that in the Calendar of the Church this year, this Sunday happens to mark the Transfiguration of our Blessed Lord. Now what some of you may not know, heretofore the Transfiguration of our Blessed Lord was celebrated on August 6. Now with the revised Calendar of the Church Year, it's introduced the Sunday before Ash Wednesday.

There are reasons of course why this has been done, and I myself would be less than honest if I didn't tell you that I'm happy indeed that it's been re-located in the Calendar of the Church, that it does come today. Because as we anticipate the Lenten season we are reminding ourselves that Lent is meant to be a time when we reflect as never before upon the nature and the quality of the life of Jesus Christ, when we concentrate upon the kind of person He was while He lived here on earth, and specifically on the unique thing that He did for us in the redemptive deed that took place on Calvary's hill.

When I stand back and look at Jesus Christ, I'm impressed of course by many things, as you are impressed by many things. Now for our purpose this morning, one of the things that impresses me is that He was never less than God. He was always equal to any occasion or event, no matter how untoward the circumstances might be, He could meet it head-on. I can readily understand why a writer in the New Testament, looking back upon Him, would say: "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."

But Lent also reminds us that He was very human. It's during this season of the year that we prepare ourselves for Holy Week, when we think of the way He suffered, the way He was humiliated, the way He deliberately sacrificed Himself in His death.

Now I want you to understand one thing: that kind of life just doesn't happen. Jesus Christ did not drop down from the heavens fully fashioned. He lived here on this earth, and grew, developed, and matured.....

...and as you look at that life, you discover that on occasion His patience was tried....but He never succumbed completely to impatience . .

...as you look at His life, there were times when He was tempted ...but He never gave way to sinning . .

...I do well to remind myself how on occasion He'd almost lash out against His disciples -- rather freely now, not recklessly but rather freely -- I'll interpret for you some of the passages of Scripture when He's talking to His disciples - -

" . . Have I been so long with you and you still haven't caught on?"

" . . How can you be so slow-witted? How can you <u>fail</u> to comprehend what I have been trying to tell you? . . "

" . . After all this time, why is it that you don't have any faith?"

....that's the kind of talk that He gave to them on occasion.

But mark you, He never ran out of patience. He still stuck with them.

And even on the very night in which He was betrayed, when that rascal of a Judas broke bread with Him, He never so much as said to Judas:

> "Get out of here! - - I can't stand the sight of you!
> - - You make me sick, to think that my investment in you would turn out like this! Of all the nights when you should be around - - - get! "

Ah, He never talked like that. Even on that very night He included Judas Iscariot in the company with all the rest.

He never ran out of love. He never ran out of patience. He never lost the divine perspective. And I'm suggesting to you with all the strength that I can command, He just didn't get that way! He remained that way because He kept Himself finely-honed to the things of the spirit. And on this Sunday that marks the Transfiguration of our Blessed Lord, we are told that He went up into the mountain to pray - - this He did again and again, of necessity, that He might not lose His sense of values....to put it in the jargon of today.

Now having said all of this, I want to tell you that I came across a word yesterday that's almost brand new for me. I checked it out in the dictionary this morning. Presumably it's been around for some time, how long I don't know, but it's uncommon in my vocabulary, I suppose because I'm never about to buy one. It refers to an instrument. I don't know that I can pronounce it correctly for you, I'll try to remember the pronunciation from the dictionary that I saw this morning, but let me spell it for you. Some of you may immediately recognize it: tachistoscope.

Why do I mention it? It's a good question. Here's my answer.

I mention it because I am troubled by what the use, or perhaps more concretely the misuse, of this instrument can do to you and to me. For our purpose this morning, it's a film projector using a high-speed shutter that

flashes messages, so I am told, every five seconds at 1 3/1000 of a second. So what? you say. Well, it's proving itself most effective in subliminal influence, which is quite a thing these days.

Go ahead, say it aloud -- you're asking yourself, well what's the preacher driving at this morning?

> ...well this is what they are able to do in these days of the mass media communication - - they project a series of images before our eyes, and then in a very subtle way an appeal is made to our subconscious, that by the use of this instrument it's what we don't see that makes its impression.

Now quite frankly, this was tried out in a six-weeks' test by some popcorn people. They devised the impressions, and without a man being aware of it -- now get this! - - before the impressions were being made upon his mind with this instrument he wasn't thinking at all in terms of popcorn.....and in a very subtle way, by these subliminal influences, the first thing he knew he was hungry for popcorn, and their sales increased 57.7 %.

Now when I read about this, I said to myself, if it's possible in this day and age to so manipulate me and to con me that they can control my physical appetite, what's going to happen when this can be done with my sense of values? And lo and behold, the very next magazine that I read touched upon that very subject!

There's such a thing as an anchor-point which constitutes the base of your thinking regarding your values. Here's the spectrum of what you believe is right and wrong, good and bad. Then somewhere between the two is what we now refer to as an anchor-point. Now by the manipulator, he can so move that anchor-point without your being made aware of it, so that finally you are so conditioned that what you once thought was wrong, now you see in varying shades

of gray, and before you know it, you permit yourself to do it, and untimately, they tell me, to enjoy it, and without any sense of guilt. That's frightening. And that's happening today.

Now you may also say to yourself, haven't we always been influenced by other forces that are at work in our lives? Haven't we known some people whose personalities have been changed because they have encountered some strong dynamic person? Of course we have! Wasn't Walt Whitman absolutely right when he said something about a child went out to play, and what that child saw became part of him - - ? But never perhaps has the conditioning been so subtle, so devious, dare I say, as now.

Now why do I mention it? I'm not forgetting that when our Blessed Lord lived there were also pressures in His day - - the pressures of a military world, the pressures of a political world, the pressures of secularism. They were at work against Him. And if He saw the necessity in His day to get away from it all, to withdraw, to meditate, to pray, to sort out His values, to see that the reservoir of the spirit continued to be filled.....if He saw the necessity for it in that day, think how much more you and I must see the necessity for it today!

That's why I've come to this sacred desk this morning, to encourage you to make much of the Lenten season, which is a time to withdraw, to reflect.... it's rooted and grounded in the divine perspective -- to take time to ask yourself in the name of God: What kind of person am I becoming as I confront these subtle influences on my life day after day after day? Make no mistake about it, we live in a world that can be branded as a world that embraces pagan values. The world as such does not challenge you and me to become Christ-like. The world itself is constantly attempting to erode our value system. And again and

ever so often we have to draw away and spend time in searching the Scriptures, in praying, in stacking up our lives against His, so that we might see how much of His love and truth we reflect.

Some of us, I am sorry to tell you, are running out of our religious capital. We have been drawing rather heavily upon the investment which our parents have made in us. We're running out of our religious capital that we built up in the days of our youth, and we're forgetting that we have to invest and re-invest constantly.

You know the story I tell you about the little boy who was asked by his grandfather, "What do you want for your birthday this year?" Much to his grandfather's surprise, he said, "Don't go looking for it in the store. It's very simple - - I want the kind of a book that you have in your desk drawer -- that little book that you take out and you write your name on a piece of paper, you tear it out and you take it to the bank, and they give you money for it -- that's what you can give me." But what the little boy in his innocence did not realize, that before you can take it out you've got to put it in!

Businesses fail or succeed as they recognize this fundamental principle. And as far as the spiritual reservoir of your soul is concerned, you've got to take time to build it up so when the need arises you can draw on it.

I think that's one reason why our Blessed Lord took with Him Peter, James and John to the mountain to pray -- because in that experience there was that great moment when they saw no one save Jesus only. And you and I have to have our moments when we see no one except Jesus only.

> ...and in seeing Him, then we live out the days of our years facing the influences that are at work against us, guided and stabilized with the light of His love and of His truth.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The First Sunday in Lent February 16, 1975

"LIFE IS A 3-D AFFAIR"

Luke 18

WE ARE nobly intentioned, O God, and we'd like to make the most of this time now as we give some measure of undivided attention to Your Word. That's why we ask for the blessing of the Holy Spirit in this moment. Amen.

We are fortunate to belong to a tradition that observes such a thing as the Lenten season. And whenever you speak of tradition, you look back and you remember prior association. As an example: as we begin the Lenten season this year I look back and remember the Gospel lessons that were read in other years just as the Lenten season began. You may not think much of it, but for myself traditionally on the Sunday next before Ash Wednesday there was a Gospel lesson from Luke. And it's made its claim upon my soul as I come to this sacred desk this morning. I can't forget it. . . . the 18th chapter of Luke, one of the verses reads like this:

> *"As Jesus turned to his disciples he said, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem . . . "*

And having told them that, He explained to them the things that were going to happen in Jerusalem. He told how He would have to suffer, how they would spit upon Him, how they would scourge Him....how they'd even put Him to death. And then He said He'd rise again. But the upshot was, according to this reference in the 18th chapter of Luke, that the disciples really didn't know what He was talking about.

Now I think it's important that you should remember that. Even though they didn't understand what He was talking about, Jesus Christ did not alter his course. He did not change His mind. He still said, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem."

This text reminds me that life is a 3-D affair. Let me explain.

First, if life is to have any meaning at all, somewhere, somehow there has to be a conscious decision made regarding it -- the kind of a life a person wants to live. And if at all possible, the manner by which he would end out his years. For it is, I think, by the grace of God, within our grasp to decide the kind of person we ultimately become.

There are people who fault us Lutherans -- did you know that? -- and they say that we don't preach enough about decision-for-Christ. There are some congregations, when people gather as we've gathered this morning, that before the benediction is pronounced and maybe in connection with the sermon, the preacher will say, "Now is there anybody here this morning who has never really made a decision for Jesus Christ? - - won't you please get up and come forward"-- it's done that way in some congregations.

There are some of you who listen to Billy Graham, and you're quite taken by that part of the service when he gives the altar call, and folks come down from the balconies and from all over and march forward - - he even has such a thing as he calls the "Hour of Decision" -- the time has come! You decide now!

I'd be less than honest if I didn't tell you that any preacher worth his salt thinks in terms of the day when he's no longer related to a particular parish, and tries to think in terms of the ways in which he might be remembered. If you'll permit me, I'll tell you how I'd like to be remembered by you when the time comes that I'm no longer your Pastor . . . I'm saying this now, not out of vanity, but out of commitment to my calling . . .

> - - I'd like to be remembered as one who exalted Jesus Christ, who in my relationship with you was constantly introducing the Christ-factor.....who every time he came to this sacred desk -- no matter how it came out, the Christ ingredient was always there, so that in

> reality in any sermon that he might preach it might be preaching for a commitment, preaching for a decision, that none of you who happens to come here on a Sunday morning might go away permitting yourself to believe that it doesn't make much difference.....

One is either for Christ or against Him. You can't have it both ways.

Now in the life of our Blessed Lord, that text in the 18th chapter of Luke reminds us that He made the decision. He just didn't happen to come into Jerusalem. It was on His itinerary, by deliberate design.

Which leads me to now tell you that having made the decision, He stuck with it - - He stayed on the road. And that's the second D in this appraisal of life as a 3-D affair. Let me introduce to you now the necessary element of discipline. What is discipline except to stick with a thing, to follow it through....not to give up....not to by-pass it.

I don't want you to misunderstand me, I don't want to be cynical. There's a great deal to be said for this generation of which you and I are part. But sometimes I lament greatly the fact that for many of us we are an undisciplined people. We give up too easily. We take alternate routes, without due and proper regard for our objective. If the Christian life is anything at all, it's a disciplined affair.

Somewhere didn't I read about a fanciful notion that a person had regarding the life of Jesus Christ - that day in and day out as He realized what His destination was, He sidetracked it, and even when He got to Jerusalem, when they were about to condemn Him, He evaded facing the issue and He said, "It's all a mistake! - - I take it all back!"....and in that fancy, one of the disciples is heard to say, "Yes, Mister"! - - it's rather subtle, isn't it? There's a world of difference between Mister and Lord.....there's a world of difference between Mister and Saviour. We call Him Saviour and we call Him Master and we call Him Lord because He paid the price of discipline -- stuck with it to the very end.

I don't know how much time you should think about the sermon that you hear on a Sunday. If you think the preacher just stands here, and then looks Heavenward, and the unction from above comes upon him and floods his soul.... ...and the words come out through his lips and hopefully into your ears - - well it doesn't happen that way! - - at least any sermon worth hearing doesn't happen that way! And surely any sermon worth remembering doesn't happen that way. There may be moments, rare indeed, when the preacher stands up and speaks out of the overflow of his soul, but even then that represents weeks and months of prayer, and discipline.

Paul Scherer, bless his soul, used to go around and talk to preachers and tell them that a really good sermon requires an hour of preparation for each minute of preaching time. And in the sermon that you are now hearing there have been hours spent in reading - - you would be impoverished indeed if every time I stood up to preach all you heard were my thoughts -- hours of reading...hours of praying....hours of writing. And would you believe it that even last night before I went to bed, and the first thing I did this morning after I became composed and set for the day, was to spend time in reflecting. Such discipline is necessary.

It ought to be true for musicians, it would seem to me. A precious girl was present here this morning at 8:30. Do you know what she did after the 8:30 service? She went down to Rieber Hall to take advantage of that handsome piano that we have because this afternoon she's playing in a competition, and in that piece that she's going to play this afternoon she's had hours and weeks and months of diligent preparation - - it just won't happen!

This week's MESSENGER will carry the announcement that in the middle of March two of our choirs will combine to sing for us Gabrielle Faure's "Requiem" - - I highly suspect that even before today, in fact weeks ago, the choir would have been exposed to certain numbers from that work - - it just won't happen!

-- or an organist comes to play a prelude or a postlude -- it means diligence by way of preparation, and the five minutes that you hear -- it just doesn't happen! It means exposing yourself to the masters, it means playing their compositions by way of diligent preparation and discipline. . .

I can't make too much of this. I wish I were free for six months sometime to write the saga which is the story of Saint Luke Church, and by that I mean to have chapter after chapter, the testimony of the disciplined life that I have found in some of you.

> . . . at the 8:30 service this morning, a man and a woman were present, and I'm free to tell you this because I told them as they went out the door that I was going to do it at this service . . .

In one of those rare moments in my life...I walked with her after we had talked here -- a night in May I think it was. She came to select the proofs for the pictorial directory. And before she left we just came in and we sat in the Nave and we talked quietly, not trying to violate the reverence of this holy place. We talked, thank God, of significant things. And then, trying to be a gentleman, I walked with her to the door, at least I thought I would, to the Dale Drive entrance.

But we just got by my office door when suddenly and absolutely unexpectedly she put both hands to her head and said something, the like of which I've now forgotten....but she slumped completely to the floor. We called the rescue squad. She was rushed to the hospital. It was an aneurism. The doctor did his best.

For weeks it seemed to us that she would spend out the rest of her years as a vegetable....but that very night, when I waited there in the emergency room by the side of her husband I knew that something brand new and glorious was being introduced. Oh, I should tell you this, just the day before, I think it was, he had retired. And the very next day they were going to go up to Pennsylvania

and stake out the place, the dream home for their retirement years. And all of this was altered now.

But I felt something in that stalwart character of his. And then day by day and week by week and month by month it was fully evidenced....he disciplined himself to pray for her, to feed her....he gave every single minute of his day, and night, to massage her muscles, to teach her how to speak again .....I even conversed with her in French this morning! back again on the road to normalcy. But it didn't just happen, you see! -- without the disciplined devotion of someone who stuck with it, by the grace of God!

I am impressed by a number of writers that I've begun to read now -- new men who loom upon the horizon. They have a pristine quality. But I'm not making the mistake of believing that it's just happening. They do a great deal of reading, they do a great deal of reflective thinking, long before that thing appears on the printed page. Discipline -- that's it!

Day after day as Jesus Christ headed toward Jerusalem He kept Himself on the road. There was always the temptation to sidetrack, to goof off. But nothing worthwhile ever results without discipline.

Paderewski -- you've heard me say it, you've heard many a preacher say it -- the great pianist, he just didn't happen. Even no matter how much God gives a person to begin with, there has to be discipline. Said Paderewski, "If I don't practice for a day, I know it.....if I don't practice for a week, my family knows it.....if I don't practice for a month, the whole world knows it." It's a necessary ingredient to the development of character.

I try to keep myself up on the language, the jargon of today....'hang loose' ....'don't get up-tight'.....'I've gotta be me' . . . I'm ambivalent, really, about some of these terms. The person has a right to be himself, but at the same time God expects him to be his best self. And somewhere along the line a person has to make a decision as to who this me is going to be. You just don't drift

into character.

> ...this whole business of open marriage, this whole business of trial marriage.....I find it difficult to understand and appreciate, not simply because it's against the teachings of the church, but because it permits people to opt out, to live a cop-out kind of experience. For when the going goes tough, you side-step it! -- you get out of it!

It's one of the lamentable things about our day in which we live. We really don't appreciate the full meaning of discipline. And if discipline means anything it means commitment.

The third D, if you don't mind -- DECISION...DISCIPLINE...DEVOTION -- to high and noble ideal and objective. In Jerusalem Jesus Christ had a rendezvous with His Heavenly Father. He had an appointment to keep. It was a grand and noble objective, and He kept himself devoted to that objective. As He was devoted to that objective He was constantly sustained and drawn toward it.

What is your objective? The church for years used to teach that we're but pilgrims in this world, and enjoyment, that Heaven was our destination. Do I have to spell it out for you that nobody goes into Heaven simply by stumbling against the door....nobody gets there just because he happened to usually pass in that direction!

I once knew a man who used to say that eventually every man has to sit down to his own banquet of consequences....which is simply to say the responsibilities for which he himself had done a great deal of fashioning. Happy indeed is that man who has a noble objective by which he is constantly conquered -- drawn by and drawn to -- "Behold," said Jesus Christ, "We go up to Jerusalem."

Decision....discipline....devotion, is a holy calling.

> ...that's really what makes life wonderful.

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday in Lent March 2, 1975

ON LETTING JESUS SPEAK
FOR HIMSELF "I AM - - THE GOOD SHEPHERD"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Today's sermon is one of a trilogy. The sermon to be preached next Sunday and the Sunday after that all have a common theme. And if today's sermon has an introduction a bit longer than usual, you'll readily understand that the introduction today constitutes the introduction to the other two sermons as well.

Let me include in the introductory words, oddly enough of all things, an old nursery rhyme. Perhaps you will recognize it:

"I do not like you, Dr. Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I know and know full well,
I do not like you, Dr. Fell."

The thought truly constitutes your frame of mind on more than one occasion, even as it constitutes my frame of mind every now and then. And there are certain people whom we meet, and then we respond in that way: there's something about them that we just don't like. We're not sure exactly why, but whether it's the first impression or the fifth impression, still we can say, "I don't like you." A wise man indeed once responded to a person who felt this way by saying, "But give yourself a chance to know that person, and if you really come to know him, you could learn to like him."

Why is it, I ask you, that we superimpose an image on certain people. We either see them through our own prejudiced eyes or we see them as others have pictured them for us, when perchance if we can sit down with them all by our-

selves and give the person a chance to speak for himself, he could get an entirely different picture.

I suggest to you that it could be that way with God, too. I'm not so sure that some people that I know have a true and correct image of God, because they deal with faulty notions about God that people have given them, or they see Him only from a certain angle. I'm quite distraught about this at times. This is one reason why I cherish those who search the Scriptures, for if the Scriptures will do anything for us at all, the Scriptures will give us, if you please, a balanced view of God by which God increasingly reveals Himself to us. That's why some of us can be found going back to the Bible, because it's the Bible that leads us to Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ is the perfect revelation of God.

I sometimes get a bit up-tight, if you don't mind my telling you that, when I think of some folks I know who are turning away from Jesus Christ and giving attention to other gods. Some of that's going on right now. And then I say to myself, as I notice with what enthusiasm they embrace the new religion, if only they would have come with the same degree of intensity and enthusiasm for Jesus Christ and allowed Jesus Christ to make His claim upon their soul in the same way that they're allowing their new redeemer to make his claim.

Oh, there's a great deal to be said for letting people really speak for themselves and not having your mind made up until you see them through their eyes! I ask your indulgence for this moment -- it's because I believe that I can trust you with this that I'm going to do it. It is quite personal. Winifred's mother is now living with us. She'll be 90 next month. She is invalided, confined to a wheel-chair. I have known her for -- well, I've known her since 1933. But recently it occurred to me, I should be no less a pastor

to her than I should be to some of you, or all of you. So by deliberate design, as I can, I'm setting aside a quarter of an hour each day just to sit alongside of her, to read from the Good Book and to offer a prayer. I have discovered something: that in these moments in which she's being paid undivided attention, she blossomed in a way that I haven't seen her blossom in a long time....and she responds. And I'm getting insights into her nature now that I hadn't had before. I'm learning certain things about her, just because I'm beginning to see all over again her basic nature and character - - through her own eyes!

The sermons to be preached today, next Sunday and the Sunday after that are inspired by certain I AM sayings of our Blessed Lord. In the Gospel according to John there are at least seven different I AM sayings which are features of self-identification on the part of Jesus Christ, in which Jesus Christ is giving us His own interpretation.

You may remember as you came here on Ash Wednesday, how Pastor David and I in the brief homilies that we shared with you, tried to impress upon you the thought that during Lent particularly we should focus upon the cross. But we simply don't focus upon the cross -- we focus upon the person who is on the cross.....that during Lent we should pay more than ordinary attention to Jesus, and in doing so let Him speak for Himself.....

- - Jesus, really now, who are you?

Today's sermon bears the title: "Jesus -- The Good Shepherd."--the text, the 11th verse of the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to John, the words of our Blessed Lord: "I am the good shepherd." And I dare say, of all the figures of speech that He applied to Himself, none quite makes the claim upon my heart as one man as does this one. And maybe it could be true for you as well.

I used to play a game of "suppose" if you don't mind my telling you this. I used to say to myself, Suppose I were a mission developer, suppose in God's plan for my life I was called upon to found a congregation...we got organized, and then the time came to choose a name. If they were to ask me -- and I suppose even if they weren't to ask me, I wouldn't be slow in telling them what I would think -- I'd have a name all ready. It's among my favorite names for congregations: THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, for the shepherding concept of God makes a claim upon the mind of each one of us.

I think I know the reason why. We remember a story that Jesus told about a shepherd. He said once there was a man who had the responsibility of a hundred sheep. And when he brought them in at night to tuck them in safely in the fold, he took count - - oh, they tell us that a good shepherd has names for them, and he'd call them by name. But for our purpose this morning, there they are, going into the enclosure....95...96...97...98...99.....that's all! And the shepherd is made aware of the fact that one is missing.

He doesn't settle for the thought, but I have 99 -- that's a very high percentage. But his concern is for the one that isn't there. Jesus said, God's like that. God has a concern for each one of us. Tell me now -- give me a number -- name me a number between 1 and 50 -- any number! What's the most important of all numbers? You're right! #1 There isn't any number more important than one.

The 100th sheep that was missing happened to be a sheep, one sheep. Jesus self-identifies - - "That's what I'm like - - this is what God is like!" And the Bible is always trying to remind us that God is like this. In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel gives us a picture of God in which God is saying, "I myself will come and seek and save my sheep." We're reminded in the New Testament that a sparrow can't even fall to the ground but what God

takes note of it! God's concern for each one of us is pictured dramatically by the expression: "Every single hair in a man's head is numbered - - " gets God's concern for each one of us.

They tell us that there are certain basic needs that all of us have, and none is more basic than the need to be recognized -- as a person. I smile broadly as I hope you'll smile broadly when I tell you this. It's about my father again. I don't suppose he had the equivalent of a 4th grade schooling in the old country, and I suppose I must have been in the 6th grade maybe, and I'd been studying about how people are elected to office in the United States, how people campaign for office, all this sort of thing. And fresh with that background I went home one day and my dad had gotten a letter in the mail . .

> ...I have to tell you the kind of letter he had gotten that day - - it was from a man running for office, say United States Senator -- it was a form letter. What my dad didn't know was that they had gotten his name from the voters' registration list, you see.....

But lo and behold, when I read this letter to my dad, form letter that it was, his response was, "But I didn't know that he knew me!" Which also reminds me again and again of this great need to be recognized and to be known as a person.

Did I ever tell you about the little girl who was disappointed when she was corrected in praying the Lord's Prayer? Somewhere along the line she had learned to pray it incorrectly. She had prayed it like this:

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, how did you know my name - - "

And when she was told that it had to be "Hallowed be Thy name" - - she much preferred the incorrect way, the satisfaction of knowing that there's a God who knew her by name. This is the precious quality of the Gospel -- that Jesus Christ saves us, that Jesus Christ saves me. That's the wonderful news.

Why do I come to this desk this morning feeling as strongly about all

this as I do? I'll tell you why. We live in an age that is rapidly depersonalizing man. We're fast becoming known by numbers. There are so many of us. Did you see that dramatic presentation several years ago -- a man committed suicide. In the drama, his reputation had been ruined, his professional career was wiped out. And the culprit? -- the computer. An error had been made, and he went mad trying to find people who were in a position to listen to him and recognize what this thing was doing to a human being. But because we live in a technological age, the computer won out. The error was never corrected, according to the playwright.

The Yale psychologist says that the curse of our generation is that we're producing the technological man, without passion -- without feeling for people.

Now let's go back to that shepherd imagery again and to that shepherd particularly who had responsibility for a hundred sheep. The shepherd did not have a responsibility for two hundred sheep, he had responsibility for a hundred sheep. You ought to remember that. Some of us suffer from emotional fatigue because we think of the masses for whom we ought to have concern. And I'd be the last person in the world to want to be insensitive to the masses. But I'm thinking of an objection that was made by Norman Couzens in the Saturday Review - - when he went out to India and interviewed a doctor. The medical chap said, "It used to drive me crazy -- I'd be treating this person, and then I'd look up and I'd see the long, almost endless line of patients waiting.....and then it occurred to me when I was being drained emotionally, that I couldn't possibly treat all of them, that my responsibility was to give the best that I had to those who were on front of me."

Sometimes we forget this. Which leads me to say to you that God has given us, every single one of us, if you please, a limited number of people for whom we have specific responsibility -- responsibility as none other has responsibility. And you and I have to be finely honed at this point, to make

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday in Lent March 9, 1975

ON LETTING JESUS SPEAK
FOR HIMSELF "I AM - - THE DOOR"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Schopenhauer, it's said, was one day seated on a park bench in a German village when a little girl came up to him and put to him very directly a pertinent question, for which Schopenhauer in turn had an answer-of-sorts. This was the question put by the little girl: "Mister -- who are you?" - - to which Schopenhauer, with a philosophic gleam in his eye, gave only an answer-of-sorts: "That's what I wish I knew."

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth people had a way of putting questions to Him. Occasionally they'd put this question to Him: "Who are you? - - Where did you come from?" Jesus Christ had no difficulty with the answers. He knew exactly who He was. For Him there was no such thing as an identity crisis. And whether or not people would put the question to Him, He spent a great deal of His time either anticipating the question or encouraging people to put the question to Him. And if they didn't put the question, He had a habit of saying to people, "I am - - - " .....and then every now and then He'd use a particular figure of speech in His attempt to offer them some measure of self-identification.

Today's sermon, as was true for last Sunday, and God willing, as will be true for next Sunday, bears upon the general theme: ON LETTING JESUS SPEAK FOR HIMSELF -- from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to John, these words:

"Jesus said, I am the door."

Now that requires some explanation, doesn't it? Well let me do my best to interpret the text for you, particularly as to its setting. He was talking to people about the nature and character of God, and then to make it as vivid as He could, He told about a man who was a shepherd . . .

> ...and the shepherd had specific responsibility for his herd or his flock of sheep. Now during the winter months, like as not the shepherds brought their sheep down from the hills and put them in a communal shelter in the village, because they only took them on short sorties during the winter-time, if they took them to the hills at all. But during the summer months it was different.
>
> ...there, as you might know, they stayed for weeks at a time. And when nightfall came, the shepherd would make-do as best he could with what he could find as a protective shelter for the night. He would not have a readily-built enclosure -- it might be within the shadow of a great rock, or it might be in some area where perhaps there was protection on two sides or three sides....but then, for the opening area, what about a door? You see, a door was necessary because wild animals could come in at night and attack the sheep. If there were a door, the sheep could be protected.....or, I'm sorry to have to tell you this, it was true then as it's true now -- always the rascal -- and there were such things as <u>bad</u> shepherds, who might even come and steal a shepherd's sheep unver cover of darkness.....the necessity for a door.

Now with no door as you and I would understand it being available, what would the shepherd do? He'd stretch himself out horizontally in that opening area,

so that now Jesus could talk about a shepherd who himself was the door. So Jesus refers to Himself as the Door, through which a person could enter and find security and shelter - - and Jesus Christ even went so far as to say, could enter into Life. Jesus said, "I am the door -- it's by me that a man enters into Life and knows security and knows shelter.

Doors are fascinating, that is, for some of us. Some of us appreciate them from the aesthetic point of view. No matter where we go we look at them architecturally. I am much intrigued by the kind of thing that was several generations ago, when the master-craftsman would work so diligently to give a distinctive touch, by carving and other designing, to his doors. In fact, quite parenthetically, do you know that in days gone by the master-craftsman would so design the moldings, that is the framing, in the door, the supporting part of it, so that when you looked at it it looked like a cross? You might discern such features in these doors on either side, or surely in the doors when you leave the Nave, so that any man, according to this devout craftsman, even when he passed through a door he might remember that because of the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ on the cross, a man enters into Life.

Doors are fascinating, of course they are aesthetically. They're also fascinating functionally -- all kinds of doors.....glass doors....plastic doors ...wooden doors....metal doors....doors that are conventionally hinged, doors that disappear within the walls, doors which by the pressing of a button disappear into the ceiling area of an enclosure. But the function remains the same: they divide, they separate. And as one passes through a door he either enters or leaves -- he finds himself within or without.

When our Lord was here on earth He talked a great deal about the Kingdom. There are two kingdoms, you know, we'd better make that plain: the Heavenly Kingdom, or the Kingdom of God.....and the other kingdom. Now we know a

great deal about the other kingdom -- we're in it constantly, its pressures and its forces are always upon us, its wearisome ways and its wickedness bear heavily on us. We know a great deal about this kingdom.

But as far as the other Kingdom is concerned, Jesus was always talking about it, telling us about how wonderful it is inside the Kingdom of God, and giving us to understand what some people don't want to reckon with, that you're either inside it, or outside it -- that there is a line of demarcation, and if you please, for the purpose of the sermon this morning, there is a door through which one enters into it. And as Jesus spoke about the Kingdom, He told about the wonderful things that you could experience inside the Kingdom, inside the Kingdom of Heaven - - - peace - - - joy, - - and love - - forgiveness . . . and the security of Eternal Life. And when He spoke about the Kingdom, it was always in an inviting way, in a winsome way, drawing us encouragingly toward it.

Which leads me to tell you two things now. When I go back home, across the Susquehanna River that leads into Williamsport, Pennsylvania, proper, once the bridge is behind us, within 25 to 50 seconds we're in Market Square. Almost any town, you know, has a Market Square or a plaza. As I remember Market Square from the days of my youth and childhood, Dad would bring us kids up from Montoursville, four miles away, and there the shopping would be done, to outfit us for the fall term of school, or that one spring in particular I remember, when I got that new suit of clothes that I could wear on the Sunday when I was confirmed.

It's about that clothing store that I want to talk just for a second.... ...Abe Stern, bless his soul, stationed one of his employees on the sidewalk, very near the main door into his store. And that chap had only one responsibility, just to stand there and to give people a smile, a happy face, a glad hand.....and then rather unwittingly, just to move in the direction of the

door. And as they did so their eye would fall on either side of the merchandise in the windows, and before they might realize it, maybe they out to look at that new suit! There are people who do that -- lead people invitingly toward a certain direction and toward a certain door.

It's circus time again for metropolitan Washington. That takes me back to a year ago when our Department of Youth Ministry sponsored Saint Luke Night at the Circus.....so I went along with you, just as happy, just as eager. And would you believe it! -- it was worth the price of admission for me just for one thing. It wasn't specifically to see the bearded lady....or the Norwegian giant whose hand was as big as my hip....nor those cyclists up there, way high against the ceiling, who soared as they revved up their engines so dramatically. For me it was worth the price of a ticket to see a sign that I knew existed, that has quite a bit of history with it.

P. T. Barnum, rascal that he was, discovered that he had people inside one of the tents where he had a lot of curios on display, and people had paid the price of admission and they were so fascinated they were reluctant to leave. And as long as P. T. Barnum knew they were in there and they were not leaving, that he wasn't selling new tickets and getting new admissions. So he devised a very clever sign: THIS WAY TO THE EGRESS. Their curiosity was aroused by the unfamiliar word, and before they knew it, they were unwittingly going in the direction of the sign that said: THIS WAY TO THE EGRESS...and then within the matter of a minute they found themselves outside the tent. And there wasn't anything there. There are tricksters in life who lead us invitingly in their direction, and when we get there, there's nothing. Jesus Christ is no trickster. Invitingly Jesus Christ says, "Come -- I am the door -- enter."

The longer I live and move among you, the more I am convinced that your desire is very intense for security, and safety. The shepherd knew that for his sheep. It was only when the darkness settled in that he could offer them

this measure of security and protection. Look what we do when darkness settles in around here -- if ever we make certain that the doors are bolted, it's at night. If it's ever when we want a measure of security and peace, it's when the day has run its course and night settles in upon us. Jesus Christ says, "I am the door -- enter through me, and know peace and security." - - - He believed it so fervently that He could say what He did: "I am the door, and I promise you if you enter through me you can enter into real life."

I am always saddened by those who offer more than they can produce. It's a cheap trick. But for those who have taken Jesus Christ at His word they have discovered that He produces, and they enter into new life. The writer in the New Testament took this so seriously, reflecting upon what Jesus Christ had said, surely, that he was able to say, "There is no other name under Heaven whereby we must be saved."

There are those who take that passage of Scripture and say it's rank arrogance -- how dare you Christians think and speak so exclusively? But you've got to remember that this is the language of one who is inside the Kingdom, and who has found this to be true. We're all in the hands of God, of course we are, whether with our belief or with our unbelief - - but for those who believe, none but His loved ones know.

And for those of you who are inside the Kingdom because of Jesus Christ, thank God for what you have. And if you're within the hearing of my voice and you think yourself on the outside, ask that your faith may be enriched, that you may be able to take Him at His word and know the joy that belongs to those who enter into newness of life. That's why I can say to you now with all the strength that my soul can command: "May the peace of God that passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Amen."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

certain that we keep our conscience sharp and we keep ourselves alert....to make certain that we care and have a continuing concern for those to whom God has given us responsibility.

Some of us are what we are, we think, traveling light-hearted down the pathway of life fairly content with ourselves -- don't misunderstand me -- but somewhat integrated as a personality because at one time or another we met somebody and recognized the responsibility that they had for us, and cared enough, to pay us attention.

Now in the final analysis I'm not so sure the important thing is what you and I may think about God. The far more important thing is that we might learn to know what God thinks about us. He places that high a value to be concerned for each one of us.

....and that's enough to keep a spring
in your step and a light in your eyes.....

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday in Lent March 16, 1975

ON LETTING JESUS SPEAK
FOR HIMSELF "I AM - - THE BREAD OF LIFE"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Today's sermon, an abbreviated one for this service, is the third and last in the trilogy for which the general theme remains: "On Letting Jesus Speak For Himself." Let's get to the text at once. It really consists of six simple words, recorded as the 42nd verse of the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"I am the bread of life."

Now you either know what these words mean, or you don't. If you know what they mean, you can well afford to have them re-interpreted for you. If perchance you don't know what they mean, then it's high time that you receive some appreciable insight as to their basic meaning.

It's very easy, of course it is, to look upon them as metaphor, as imagery, and walk away and fail to ask yourself, what now is the inherent meaning of such words as "bread of life"? Jesus is wont to use such metaphors . . .

....He said -- "I am the good shepherd - - "

....He said -- "I am the door - - "

....He said -- "I am the way -- the truth and the life - - "

-- "I am the bread of life - - - - "

What do these words mean? Let the question be asked again.

And when you begin to probe, the very first thing that you find, of course, is the obvious - - bread -- it's basic! By it life is sustained. Without it we cannot live.

I remember seeing a new-born infant as he was brought to his mother's bed for the first time. And as she bared her breast he instinctively responded. From the very beginning the hunger pang must be satisfied. And all other things being equal, to the very day that we die we go reaching for bread. It's that basic. It's that necessary.

It's the one thing that we share in common. Some years back when I went to cross the Atlantic for the first time, I would much have preferred to have put down in England as my first assignment, where I would be familiar with the tongue. But my first assignment took me to Sweden....strange land, and a strange tongue. I muse now when I think about it.....a friend said, "You'd better be prepared, so let me teach you some basic Swedish:

"Jag är Hungrig . . " "Jag är törstig . " "Tack så mycket . . "

...she knew full well before long I'd be saying, "I am hungry" . . . "I am thirsty" . . . it's that basic, no matter where you may go. . . "Thank you."

Do you remember how Shakespeare's character Shylock in the Merchant of Venice puts it?

> "Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hunt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not have revenge?"

The point's made, of course it is -- naturally, easily. Bread is basic to all mankind.

By this you can understand, can't you, that Jesus wasn't talking about that kind of bread. He was talking about the kind of bread which is the bread of Life -- spiritual life. And He would have us understand that man does not live by bread alone -- bread that goes into the oven, bread that you slice. He was talking about the kind of thing that a man needs to be sustained spiri-

tually.

And then He made bold to say something the like of which none other has ever been able to say. He said, "I am the bread of life - - - I am the one who is able to sustain you spiritually." Without this kind of bread a man dies spiritually.

Which leaves me to pose the question for you immediately: What about your spiritual diet? This is a great day, you know, in which we talk about food: supply...the demand....the price. This is a great day in which we talk about nutrition or malnutrition. I wonder if we've ever had a more diet-conscious generation on our hands. It may be all well to the good, but I wish we could get half as excited about spiritual food, if we'd go to just as great a pain to talk about spiritual diet that we do for the diet menu of the food that's spread on the table.

Did I ever tell you that a wise man once observed that far more important than the food that we put into the body when we eat at dinner-time is the conversation that takes place around the dinner table? I'd like to think that some of you keep coming back to this place each Lord's Day because of the spiritual fare that's provided you, because of the spiritual table that's provided. Here every Lord's Day we guarantee you a full menu:

PARDON - - a man can't live without God's forgiving love....

Here every Lord's Day, within this place, we spread a table for you by which we offer you LOVE.....and TRUTH.....a man can't live without love and truth ....I'd like to think that that's one reason why some of you keep coming back to this place, or mark the path that leads to any altar, because you know full well that your spiritual diet must be cared for.

Who is that character, of Shakespeare again, who says, "Upon what meat doth this Caesar feed?" - - stalwart character that he was, he just didn't happen. He was being nurtured, he was being nourished - - he was being sustained. But

giants of character don't get that way. They become that way by the way they're nourished.

Long before Jesus Christ, the psalmist, however, said, "O taste and see that the Lord is good." No matter what the food is that's spread before you, it has little value until you taste it, until you actually consume it. And happy indeed is that man who has a good appetite. The French are perfectly right when they sit down to a meal and say so enthusiastically, "bon appetit!" You are to be commended, my friend, when you come to this place eagerly looking forward to what you are about to receive. It's a very necessary quality that adds to the ingredient itself.

But I always sadly think of those who need to be better fed. On a street on which I once lived they told me about a lady who died - - I thought she was rather well off -- but they tell me the attending physician recorded her death as a result of malnutrition -- she ate alright, but she didn't eat the proper food. I sadly observe the contemporary scene when I see how people feed and feast upon what's evil. Some people have a constant died of hatred and envy. They suffer malnutrition at the end.

And sometimes when I think about this whole business of feeding, and eating, I think of the hospital room in which they roll in the gadgets. Then because it's necessary for the patient to be nourished, they force-feed, because of the end result that they cherish. Well, we've never been able to do that with the Christian religion. There is no device by which we can force-feed you spiritually. We just can't jam love down your throat, it's as incompatible as all that, of course. So despite the fact that Jesus Christ may offer Himself to us as the Bread of Life by which a man can be sustained eternally, still a man must come to the table - - still a man must desire what he's about to receive.

Now there is one final observation that I'm constrained to make despite

the limitation of time. At 8:30 this morning she was present. When I saw her when the service was over, I instinctively responded -- I couldn't do otherwise. I looked into her face and I said, "You're aglow with the spirit" - - there are people that we meet like that, who when we look at them, they personify all that's good physically -- a hearty glow -- a fresh, a healthy look. And we presume, you see, that they have been eating properly and exercising regularly. Don't underestimate the necessity for having eaten properly. I think Christians were meant to be healthy, hearty, happy-looking people, because of the diet that sustains them.

Do you remember I used to tell you about that trip that we made to California some years back? The city was Los Angeles. Walking down the street, we came to this shop -- we were intrigued immediately by what we saw in the window, a display of herbs and nuts and dried fruits....book after book of recipes, and all the attractive folders telling us that if we only entered and made the purchases, we'd be introduced to a new life -- longer life, and better life.

I was instinctively drawn toward the door. And as I was about to cross the threshold I reached for my wallet - - who wouldn't want to take advantage of something as promising as this! But then, as I entered, my eye fell upon the man at the counter.....as-sickly-a-looking character as I think I have ever seen. And I reasoned with myself, what right had I to believe that what he was selling would do more for me than what it had done for him?

And they tell me occasionally there are some people who turn away from Christianity for that very reason - - - and by the same token there are those of us who believe in it because of what we've seen how Jesus Christ sustains unmistakably the lives of those who made it easy for us to believe in Him.

.....and that could be you, my friend.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - The Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.
Easter Day March 30, 1975

"FOLLOW THE LEADER"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from Jesus Christ
His Son, our Resurrected Lord.
Amen.

We kids called it the 'haunted house.' It was located on the outskirts of that small town. And on any given Sunday afternoon when the weather was right we'd be drawn toward it, intrigued, fascinated. We'd approach it stealthily, of course . . . sometimes we'd walk around all sides of its Victorian porch, then we'd wait - - - to be frightened.

. . . that we did on a Sunday afternoon in a small town,

for want of something else to do.

Or, if we didn't head in the direction of the 'haunted house', we'd walk the railroad tracks that edged that small town - - daringly, of course, to place a copper penny on the tracks, or a ten-penny nail, and to wait for the mighty locomotive to come and flatten it. We were intrigued.

. . . that's what you could do on a Sunday afternoon in a

small town.

But like as not, the thing that I remember particularly this morning is how when we might gather together as a bunch of kids and play "Follow the Leader." How the leader happened to be chosen I don't quite remember any more, but I do remember how we followed him, and did those seemingly crazy and ridiculous things, and tried to keep up with him no matter where he went.

. . . maybe he led us through a pool of water

. . . maybe across a neighbor's yard -- and up over the

fence we went just as he did

> . . . maybe toward the front part of the porch of that house across the street that was so inviting...and then off to the side of it.

So we followed the leader.

Why this unconventional introduction to the sermon on this Easter Day, when presumably you've come, waiting for the preacher to talk about the empty tomb? Well I'm not about to do it. I could have given you your choice, perhaps, and asked you outright - - which would you rather have, a sermon about "The Empty Tomb"? - - or a sermon about "The Man Who Wasn't There"?

I don't know how you might answer, but I can tell you how the early Church answered. They really never much concerned themselves about the empty tomb, but they went forever talking about The-Man-Who-Wasn't-There-Because-He-Was-Somewhere-Else. And that leads me to the text for this sermon today, brief as it may be. From the Gospel for the day, the 7th verse of the 28th chapter of Matthew:

> "He is not here, for he goes before you into Galilee . . "

Look at it this way, my friend - - evil did have its day. It did its worst. The world had a chance to claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and rejected Him. There was such a thing as the crucifixion, which is man's blatant rejection of God, but then three days later they found an empty tomb.

But deal with the truth that lies inherent in the fact of the empty tomb. Some of you I know very well get hung up at that point. You can't quite figure out in your own mind how Jesus Christ could slip out of those grave cloths, and then take on a form again that could be recognized. And because you can't quite figure that out, you walk away! - and you don't get the greater truth.

The greater truth lies in the fact that the word that came out of the

Resurrection Garden was: "He isn't here -- because -- He is there! Now that's not an attempt for double-talk. The fact of the matter is that we happen to have the kind of a God who simply will not take rejection and walk away. We happen to have a God who will not wash His hands of this world, no matter how we might behave. We happen to have a God who keeps coming back to us and says, "Let's try all over again - - follow me."

We live in a world that's like a haunted house...

> ...we're frightened by the evil that we might not even be able to call by name, but we're frightened.

We live in a world that's like a giant locomotive that's

> always heading our way.....about to flatten us out.

We also live in a world that was meant to have a leader. Man cannot find his own way, so God comes back to us. We do not choose Him as a bunch of kids -- we chose our leader and decided to follow him. We're not qualified to make the choice of the leader that we need most. So God made the choice for us, and He gave us Jesus Christ.

Look at it that way . . . and He says to us after the crucifixion, "All right, we'll begin all over again - - - follow me." And would you allow me to tell you that just as when we kids played "Follow the Leader," our leader might call us to do all kinds of crazy and ridiculous things -- can you take it, my friends? - - - Jesus Christ, as our Leader come back to us, calls us to do all kinds of crazy and ridiculous things:

> "Follow me" He says, and look what happens as He goes ahead of us . . .
>
> -- He begins to love all kinds of people, including the unlovable, as we brand them
>
> -- He likes all kinds of people, including the unlikeable, as we brand them

-- He recognizes the spark of divinity that's down deep inside people in a way that we don't ....and He says, "Follow me" - - - up to all kinds of crazy and ridiculous things. We're the learned ones, we're the sophisticates -- not about to accept very much unless we can figure it out. Then we get stymied as we go through life, but then God sends to us His Leader, who has this crazy thing of a childlike trust in a Heavenly Father, who believes in His basic goodness.

Any man who is worthy of the name father, or grandfather, knows full well what a wonderful thing it is to have a child turn to him and simply trust. As we take our way through life, with this ever-threatening, over-powering machine that will tend to flatten us, our Leader says, "Take heart -- be of good courage." .....you have a God who knows you are not meant for defeat or despair.

You want to talk about the miracle of Easter? Don't misunderstand me, I don't dwell overmuch with the empty tomb. Neither did the early Church. The Gospel writers mention it. But once the early Church got its bearings they went on forever talking about "The-Man-Who-Wasn't-There-Because-Now-He-Was-Everywhere-Present" - - - the Perpetual Person - - - the Continuing Companion. That's the miracle of Easter. He's here. Some of you unmistakably have felt His presence already.

And then once this service is over, He'll be out there ahead of us, waiting for you in your home -- tomorrow morning waiting for you where you work. He'll always be ahead of you, and He'll be saying, "Follow me."

If you really want to talk about another miracle, it's the kind of transformation that sets in once you take Him at His word, stick close to Him, and keep moving in His direction. That's the miracle that I've seen in some of you. And that's why some of you make it easier for me to believe the miracle which is Easter. . . . . this I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday of Easter April 6, 1975

"ON BEING CHRIST-MINDED"
(Philippians 2:5)

O GOD, Quiet our minds and hush our hearts and make us sensitive to the interpretation of Thy Word. In the name of Jesus Christ, who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

Tell me it doesn't make any difference to you that I can't remember whether I read it in the Washington Post or the New York Times, and that it's likewise of little consequence to you whether it was Thursday morning's paper or Friday's . . . but I do remember this: it was a Congressman, a member of the House of Representatives from a nearby state, who maintains that this nation of ours has a new regard for Congress. Says this Congressman, up until the 60's perhaps we trusted our Presidents. But then, sad to relate, we discovered that there was such a thing as the abuse of presidential power. Now, says this Congressman from Delaware, the nation is looking to Congress to straighten us out.

Now relax, my friend, I haven't come to this sacred desk this morning, heaven forbid! - to engage your attention in a dissertation regarding the balance of one branch of Government against another, or to offer a rebuke for one and then to ask you to look toward another, hopefully by way of challenge for something better. But I have come to this sacred desk to remind you that there is such a thing as the abuse of power, the abuse of power by every single one of us, lest we guard against it.

It's a very easy thing to direct one's attention against the tyrant, and the dictator, the Prime Minister, or the man who had been President of the United States - - and to talk about what they might have done but failed to do because they abused their power. But would you believe it, every single one of us has some position of influence - - - every single one of us has some power

to weild. Look at it this way: most of us have some power to use, whatever our station in life or role - - we do exercise a measure of influence, some of course more so than others. And now for the Christian, this is an awesome thought, since the power that a person wields can be for another person's good, or for his detriment.

And having said this, let me introduce the text for this brief sermon, which directs the thrust of all that's to follow, and all that's already been said. The text is from a letter that that tent-mender-turned-preacher wrote to a group of Christians who lived in the Philippian community. It's the 2nd chapter, the 5th verse:

> "Let this mind be in you which was
> also in Christ Jesus . . . "

...whatever your influence in life may be, let it be according to the mind and the manner of Jesus Christ. This is what a Christian must remember.

For a number of years I have kept close at hand at my reading desk a book that was compiled by that beloved Scotsman, John Bailey. It bears the title, "A Diary of Readings". It was his custom throughout his years, that when he read something that was of great personal profit, he clipped it, or recorded it, and then all of us now draw the benefit of that master-mind of his which had so great an appreciation for illustrious thought on a variety of subjects.

On page 26, which is the selection for that certain day of the year, he quotes James Martineau, who speaks to this very theme. If you don't mind, I'd like to give you the direct quotation:

> "There is a sphere in the life of everyone, except the child, in which he is appointed to rule, and to exercise some functions for the methods of his own will, from the monitor in the school to the minister of an empire, there are gradations of authority that leave no one without a place. Would you know the real worth of any soul, be it another or your own? That is the sphere on which you should fix your eye. It is a little thing that a man goes right, under orders, when he is obliged to serve.

> "You may always make a good soldier by sufficient drill, and amid the pressure of custom and beneath the light of the public gaze, even a passive and pliant conscience may be shaped into good looks and wear a gloss. But how is it, with you, in your place of power? - - among the servants, whom you may govern -- the children, whom you train -- the companions who place you at their head? Do you take liberties there, as if there were nothing to concentrate, and fling about the circle, as if you were free of all the field? Do you grant exemptions to yourself, exemptions of laziness, exemptions of temper, exemptions of truth?"

So there you have it, my friend. Every single one of us is not without some influence. Every single one of us, regardless of his station or role in life, has some power to wield.

Now it's very easy for us to point the finger of condemnation to those who sit in high places and talk about the way they abuse their power. I'd tickle your fancy, perhaps, this morning, if I reminded you of what happened in the Dominican Republic, how for more than 30 years Raphael Laonidis Truell (?) bent those people to his own will, how he even wanted to name the place after himself, which he did -- that is, regarding certain streets and boulevards -- the highest peak he chose to name for himself. Small wonder, his people, after they had seen how he abused his power, rejoiced when he was assassinated, and within three years after his death his name was obliterated from every place where he had put it.....and what is more, they erected a monument at the site of his assassination, not only to commemorate his death but to pay tribute to the man who killed him! You listen with some degree of interest when I point the finger of condemnation to a tyrant such as that, who abused his power. But how often do you and I look upon ourselves, to ask the question, how properly do we use the influence that we have? Any man, I dare say, wherever he may be, has some influence on someone else.

Some years back, a well-meaning writer got out a little religious tract

entitled: "Making Your Life Count" - - as though one had to do it by deliberate attempt. But the title for the tract is only half-right. The religious folder would have been better entitled: "Making Your Life Count For Good" - - because every man's life does count. But says the Apostle Paul, let it count for good in the name of Jesus Christ - - let this be your attitude, let this be your mind, let this be your treatment of one another, according to the mind, the manner and the attitude of Jesus Christ.

Whether you like it or not, Jesus Christ exacts a high standard for us, knowing full well that we will have influence. And the Apostle Paul says, let your influence, then, be according to the mind, the manner and the attitude of Jesus Christ -- it is a standard that the world exacts from us. For if Christians do not behave as Christians, who then will? And if those of us who claim His love and purpose to be His servants do not walk in His way, who will?

Now very quickly, let me draw to your attention the areas of your own personal influence.....

> - - a man has power even by the things that he thinks. Before the words are spoken - - I have sat in some committee meetings where I have felt a dominating influence by a man who never so much as said a word because there were those of us in that room who could tell exactly what he was thinking. I once knew a man who was so better and cynical regarding life that some of us used to say that if we stepped out into the corridor five minutes after he had gone that way, we could almost sense by the atmosphere that remained that he had moved in that direction. A man has influence by what he thinks even though the thought may be unexpressed verbally . . .
>
> - - a man has influence by the manner by which he enters a room! -- by his very poise, by the sheer force of his personality. They used to say of Dwight D. Eisenhower, that he was the kind of a man who when he walked

into a room, people began to think together! - - he had a way of softening the hostilities that might have been present. There are people who have that gift of personality and the power that comes with it is meant to be used wisely and well . . .

- - those who have charisma have an endowment which is never to be abused. There is such a thing, then, as the power of personality and the influence of a man's unspoken thought . . .

- - and by the same token there is the influence of a man which he wields with the words that he speaks. That's why some of us would crawl into a hole if we could, trying to recall a word that we had spoken -- would to God we had not uttered it, because we suddenly realize the influence of what we've said upon somebody else.....and by the same token there are whose for whom I rise up and call them blessed because in good and proper season they have spoken the right word with grace and with compassion.

Let me make this sermon as relevant as I amy for the moment. I sat in a committee meeting yesterday morning where a man said, "It's a pity - Saint Luke is quite a large church now. There was a day when we knew a number of people but now it seems we know fewer and fewer.".....and then I heard another man say, that same morning, "Well, if you were in a small church, you'd get to know so many people by name. And maybe there's a limit to what you can do by knowing people by name - - it simply means that in a small church you know a certain number, but maybe in Saint Luke it's within your limitation, and also within your extansion, to be able to know as many people."

Now for the moment, let me tell you this: do you realize the power that you have, today, in this place, before this service is over, to wield a measure of gracious influence by what you could say to somebody whom you may not know by name? Ethel Anderson, bless her soul, -- she's not here this morning, I can

speak freely - - I stood by her side one time and observed how she did it so graciously.....she stepped forward and said to a person that she hadn't recognized, "I don't think I know who you are, I don't think I know your name. I'm Ethel Anderson - - let me welcome you to Saint Luke . . . " As gracious as all that! - - and the influence that was engendered in the name of Jesus Christ!

I think sometimes how this place could be transformed, on any given Lord's Day, if any number among you would exercise the measure of grace, and consideration, that you could wield in a manner as simple as all that!

Allow the way Edna Saint Vincent Millay put it:

> "They may not need me, yet they might;
> I'll let myself be just in sight;
> A smile so small as mine may be
> Precisely their necessity."

Need I establish the point finally, that every single one of us exercises power, not simply by the thoughts that we think, the words that we speak, but also by the things that we do.

Said the Apostle Paul: "Let this mind be in you which also was in Christ Jesus." . . . He humbled Himself, He became obedient...He took on the form of a servant.....

What's your power-rating, my friend? You have one. But that's not the important question. How are you wielding it? - - to whose glory?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HOW TO HANDLE LONELINESS"
(John 16:32)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen.

Any pastor worth his salt in all likelihood will at one time or another in the course of his sermon make a statement with which his congregation, granted it has integrity, of course, may disagree. At some risk I am going to begin my sermon this morning by asking you to consider something with which you might be inclined to disagree at once! Well here it is: in this very place at this very time there could be someone who considers himself the loneliest person on earth. Despite the fact that you may be surrounded by hundreds of people -- right now -- at this very moment, some one among us could think himself as the loneliest of all people.

Now if this should not be true now, maybe you're numbered among those who last night felt himself as lonely as all that.....or maybe before tomorrow or the week is over you'll be branding yourself the "loneliest of all people." You'll disagree with this: at some time or another you have been lonely, if you are not lonely now. And most certainly at some time in the future, if you've never known what loneliness is, it may set in for you.

That's why by deliberate design I've included in the sermon schedule the sermon that's about to be preached, bearing the title, "How To Handle Loneliness." The text -- of course -- the recorded words of our Blessed Lord, the 32nd verse of the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"You shall leave me alone."

Can you imagine Jesus Christ lamenting the fact that He's going to be left alone? The very ones whom He had chosen to be His friends, the ones of all the

people that He had ever met, He had personally selected them, and they had been with Him for three years. And now He says to them - - "You're going to leave me."

They couldn't understand the words, of course they couldn't understand as we understand them....

-- did Peter fully appreciate the fact that when Jesus talked about somebody denying Him, that he actually would?

- - do you suppose for a single minute that Judas Iscariot fully understood when our Blessed Lord said, "One among you, one of my twelve, one of my men, will betray me . . " ?

- - do you suppose any among them had the slightest notion of what He meant when He said, "Every single one of you will forsake me and flee"?

Says Jesus Christ pathetically -- if you've ever had even so much as an opening of the door into His humanity, this text allows it -- when Jesus Christ lamentably says, "You will leave me alone -- ".....but He hastens on, and let Him finish His sentence - - "Yet I will not be alone, because the Father is with me."

Let me tell you the story as I heard it or as I read it. I presume it was Brooklyn -- or one of the five boroughs of New York, it doesn't make any difference -- they discovered the little old lady dead in her chair, in her one-room apartment. The medical examiner's report said that she had been dead for maybe a week, two weeks -- let's say two weeks. That's a sad story, isn't it, in one of the largest cities in the world, in a day and age when we have more people living than ever lived before (we're over-populated, we say, with people, people all around you) -- to die alone, and to have your death go undetected for two weeks. Sad.

But- the sadder side of the story you have yet to hear.

They discovered on the stand alongside of her chair in which she had died a diary that she had kept. And as they thumbed the pages of that diary they found that the entries for the last two weeks were basically the same...except for the last entry that she made. It had an additional word.

For two weeks before she died, this was the entry, day after day -- a simple statement: "Nobody came to see me today."

The last entry that she made before her death was the same, plus an introductory word: "Still nobody came to see me today."
Even the most insensitive, you see, are moved by hearing a story such as this, and chances are, when you and I think of loneliness we think of the loneliness of the little old people.

But I come quickly to tell you this morning that loneliness is not something that belongs only to the aged. Loneliness is being cut off -- that's what loneliness is -- loneliness is being separated. There is such a thing as the loneliness of age of any age. Let me read it for you again. It appeared on the front page of this week's MESSENGER . . .

> " . . . now let's understand a thing or two about loneliness. It is not primarily a matter contingent upon age, time, nor place. A child of six can be lonely; a great-grandfather at eighty-five can be the friendliest chap on the block. Nor is it to be equated with the presence or absence of people. One can be most lonely when surrounded by people . . . "

There is the loneliness of age of any age.

A child can be lonely - - why do you suppose he wants a pet? Why do you suppose he wants to surround himself with toys? Why do you suppose he wants you to tuck him into bed at night?

As a highly esteemed parishioner of ours once said to me, when

> she put her daughter to bed, "Now you go to bed. God will watch over you." And the child replied, beautifully so, "But He doesn't kiss me goodnight." A child wants to relate. And what is loneliness but being cut off -- not having a relationship?

I was startled the other day when I read a Roman Catholic publication -- I subscribe to at least three of them. One of them had an article written by Thomas Cluen in which he talked about the loneliness of the teenager. It made quite an impact upon my mind for I'd forgotten, you see, how lonely a teenager's world can be.....

> And then it all brought back to me rather vividly how lonely I was during adolescence. God bless my parents, now of sainted memory, they never even knew there was such a word as adolescence. But how they endured my existence of it and my passing through it. In that little town we lived in a Victorian-style house, with its gabled ends. It had three storeys, with a winding stairway -- how I used to take it to the very top floor and there, in that gable end, was a little room. Now I look back and realize how much it meant to me. It was my shangri-la, it was my refuge. Throughout that whole ordeal of adolescence I would go there every now and then when I felt I was being cut off, by pressures and forces and people who couldn't quite understand the world in which I was moving.....

This article on the loneliness of the teenager brought it all back to me. A teenager's world is a lonely one. The Beatles, you see, made it very real for us when they sang about 'all the lonely people.' Sometimes even a teenager's solo-type dance reflects his separation from other people.

In this highly mobilized world in which we live we're being uprooted, you see, in being transferred from place to place. I told a group of confirmands

last night in Bieber Hall that once when I had a retreat session with a group of post-confirmands at Bethany, one of the youngsters told me that, having been fourteen years of age at that time, his family had moved thirteen different times - - that means uprooting, that means taking you away from some very precious people in your life.

Some of us look back and remember a stabilized community, where when you went to church on Sunday you saw grandpa, and you saw grandma, even if you didn't see them during the week....you saw your aunts and your uncles, you saw your school-teacher, your friends and your neighbors. There were those grandchildren of yesteryear, you know, who when things began boiling up for them at home, packed a little knapsack and hied themselves off to Grandma's house -- putting the grandparents in a predicament, of course, in a peculiar bind, because they couldn't harbor them -- they had to go back. But they were there!

Did I tell you this before -- that social scientists tell us that teenagers are relating to fewer and fewer adults. And yet they need to relate to them. And all of this means a kind of loneliness at any age.

One of the saddest things I think I ever read was the appraisal of a social psychologist who said that you can justify in the minds of some prostitutes their role in life, because they feel they need to relate to someone, if only briefly, and for a base reason.

There's the loneliness that sets in among the middle-aged. Why do they join the groups they do? Of course there's the loneliness when age itself sets in, when one's circle of friends and relatives diminishes year by year.

There's the loneliness not only of any age, but also there is the loneliness of the afflicted, the physically handicapped.

> - - when a man begins to lose his eye-sight -- to be cut off from the things that the rest of us can see and relate to

> - - the loneliness that sets in with the physically handicapped when she begins to lose her hearing, and she is cut off from the normal kind of conversation that the rest of us have....
> - - there's the loneliness that sets in not only for the physically handicapped but also for the emotionally disturbed -- they have their fears, their failures, their frustrations, and they're separated -- they're shunted aside because of their peculiarities - - how we deliberately put aside the neurotic -- they get on our nerves, we find it difficult to tolerate them when they deliberately feed upon our sympathy.....

There is the loneliness that sets in when those who are afflicted by circumstances over which they have no control -- the widowed, or the father and mother who have a son or a daughter taken away -- the whole new adjustment that has to be made! Otherwise life passes you by, and you're shunted aside....separated .....that's what loneliness is -- cut off.

There is the loneliness in the third category, if you don't mind, and that is the loneliness of the aristrocratic -- the elite -- those who tower above us by virtue of their achievement or their talent, or their station in life. One of the greatest sermons ever preached was preached by Robertson of Brighton, and the subject was "The Loneliness of Christ" - - - to have to deal constantly with people who didn't move in His world, who couldn't adjust themselves to His spiritual climate. And yet to deal with them. They constantly made Him a world all alone.

> ....more than one president has referred to the White House as the loneliest place in town.....

But I have news for you, my friend. Loneliness must be accepted as a fact of life. It dare not be ignored. When God made us, He made us to relate, despite the circumstances of life that may separate us.

Now the tragic thing about loneliness is not the fact that it may exist. The tragedy lies in our inability or our failure to learn how to cope with it, how to handle it. Cut off by His friends, Jesus Christ knew that He would still have to keep open the lines of communication with His Heavenly Father. And as He kept open the lines of communication with His Heavenly Father, He re-gained a sense of perspective as to how to deal with circumstances over which He had no control. Granted you and I have our health and our strength, I honestly believe that it is possible to learn how to cope with loneliness, we need not to succumb to it.

Now I don't have to tell you, do I, that loneliness or solitude are not the same? For myself, I crave solitude. I covet for myself the opportunity of being alone, that I might feel more than ever the very presence of God. And being made aware of the presence of God, I begin to see you in a new relationship. And in those moments of solitariness I can come back to you and serve you better. Loneliness and solitude are not the same. Jesus Christ mastered the art of handling loneliness. There are people in this congregation who have mastered it - - it's no small wonder that some of the most productive work that's carried on in this congregation is carried on by people who live alone. And I think maybe there are disciples of "Mrs. Wiggs of The Cabbage Patch" who gave wholesome advice: "Don't go and get sorry for yourself - - that's the one thing I can't stand in nobody. There's always lots of other folks you can be sorry for 'stead of yourself' . . . "

Beloved, loneliness need not be a walking death, if you plan to keep company with Jesus Christ. Maybe one of these days you'll look on Page Four of the MESSENGER and you'll find it - - it's worth printing. It's a prayer for those who live alone. . . . .

A PRAYER
FOR THOSE WHO LIVE ALONE

I live alone, dear Lord,
Stay by my side,
In all my daily needs
Be Thou my guide.
Grant me good health,
For that indeed, I pray,
To carry on my work
From day to day.
Keep pure my mind,
My thoughts, my every deed,
Let me be kind, unselfish
In my neighbor's need.
Spare me from fire, from flood,
Malicious tongues,
From thieves, from fear,
And evil ones.
If sickness or an accident befall,
Then humbly, Lord, I pray,
Hear Thou my call, A
And when I'm feeling low,
Or in despair,
Lift up my heart
And help me in my prayer.
I live alone, dear Lord,
Yet have no fear,
Because I feel your presence
Ever near. Amen.

.....loneliness need not be a walking death. You can have the companionship of Jesus Christ.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday of Easter April 20, 1975

"LEARN BY LIVING"
(Genesis 5:27)

IT IS not easy, O God, either to prepare a sermon or to listen to one. We need Your help. Therefore, through the Holy Spirit, lay hold upon the preacher and the listener as well, that together we may draw benefit. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord, Who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

They were two of a kind. Small wonder then that the question that was put to them was identical. Their answers, alike, were yet dissimilar. They were both grandfathers, and here is the one question put to both of them:

"Grandpa, how old are you?"

Grandpa Number One answered: "Old enough to know better."

Grandpa Number Two responded: "Old enough to have learned a thing or two."

...the answers alike, yet dissimilar.

For together these answers indicate that life must be looked upon as a learning process, and one either masters the art of learning what life is all about, or he doesn't. At some point he reaches the stage where he can honestly say that he's learned something, that he has drawn benefit and experience, that the years have not been spent in vain. Or he could come to a point in life where he looks back and laments the fact that he hasn't learned very much.

I suggest to you this morning that the lesson of lessons that needs to be learned is the fact that life is meant to be lived and to be lived well, the prize does not belong to those who live simply to a ripe old age. There's a text for this sermon. For those of you who know your Bible, perhaps you've decided already what the text is going to be. We go all the way back to the Old Testament, to the very first Book in the Old Testament, the Book of Genesis, the 5th chapter, the 27th verse. And for some of you it could be that

the words of the text are already being formed on your lips:

> "Thus all the days of Methuselah were
> nine hundred and sixty-nine years;
> and he died."

A preacher is thrilled with a text such as this, honestly he is, for what it says and for what it doesn't say. The bare facts are there -- the man's name, his age, and the fact that he died, together with a comment that invites further comment - - - "and he died." Well, let your imagination be triggered . . .

...where did he die?

...from what did he die?

...if he had such a grand track record of 969 ears, why did he have to die at all?

...if he could accumulate a past like that, why couldn't he keep going?

...facetiously speaking, he should have been maintained just by momentum!

A physician, no less, was intrigued by this text, and this is what he had to say. Anyone who has read the Bible or studied the Old Testament, remembers Methuselah as the oldest man -- "old as Methuselah" has become a by-word. But, maintained he, Methuselah might have lived longer. Now to support that he calls to our attention some of the data that appears in chapter 7 of the book of Genesis, as well as chapter 5. He says Methuselah was 187 years old when Lamach was born, and Lamach was 182 years old when Noah was born....and how old was Noah at the time of the flood? -- this is important -- Noah was 600 years old at the time of the flood. So with your mental calculator, add 187 to 182, plus 600, and you get a total of 969 years - - - that's how old Methuselah was when he died. And that was the year of the flood.

....now, says this physician as he asks the question, was Methuselah drowned in the flood? Did he then die prematurely? But for the flood, might he have lived longer? At any rate, according to the story, Methuselah has lived longer than anybody else. He is the symbol of longevity.

Now quite parenthetically, you ought to know the referral that's prompted this sermon. I'm having my first close-hand relationship with age. For Winifred's mother will be 90 years of age tomorrow. She lives with us now, she's invalided, confined to a wheelchair. Don't misunderstand me when I tell you this, it's altered our life-style, of course it has. Constant care, readily available, almost like having a child in the house all over again, because the length of time when you can be away from the house is automatically determined. It's not a burden - - let me make that perfectly clear. It's not a burden because we couldn't possibly live long enough to repay her, and my debt to her for Winifred is very great. We love her. And then there's a third reason: it's becoming increasingly plain to me how much she teaches us.

I never quite looked at it that way before. There are the lessons that only old people can teach. They've lived a bit longer, they've traveled down the road a bit farther, they've plumbed the depths of life as those of us who are younger haven't done. There's a great deal to be said for longevity....and granted you have health and strength, chances are you'd like to be old some day -- most certainly if you're 30 or 40 or 50 you'd like to be older.

And I have news for you . . . chances are you will live longer than your parents lived. Are you aware of the fact that right now in the United States of America there are 10,000 people who are 100 years of age and over? Are you aware of the fact that there are now, I think, 3,430,000 people who are 85 years of age and over? (Take comfort in that, Alex -- you have 3 million people keeping company with you!) Are you aware of the fact that 8 out of 10 will live to be 50.....7 out of 10 now living will reach, in all likelihood,

70 years of age? So we're becoming quite conscious now of the fact that we could live longer.

But as I come to this sacred desk this morning I am in duty bound to warn you: the hallmark of life does not lie simply in longevity. The sad thing about Methuselah, the oldest man who ever lived, was after he died the only thing that they could record about him was his age, and the fact that he died. It isn't how long one lives.....it's how well one lives, whatever the termination date may be that God may have in mind.

In contrast to Methuselah, think of the life of our Blessed Lord. Our Heavenly Father gave Him only 33 years on this earth, and what He did with those 33 years has altered the face of humanity. I lay hare my soul to you when I tell you that I have a most uncomfortable feeling when for myself I think of all the additional years that God has given to me over and beyond what He gave His Son. What have I to show for the fact that I've lived longer than 33 years?

Tertullian once discovered in the Christian congregation of which he was part a fellow member who was engaged in unethical business practices. He couldn't help but take him to task. And his fellow member simply retorted by saying: "But a man's got to live" - - as though that would justify alone his disreputable behavior. And Tertullian, God bless him, cut him to the quick by simply asking: "Why?" . . . well, there you have it. Not how long does one live, but <u>why</u> does one live?

Some of you heard me say this before, and I've never heard it put better. In the words of the first question of the old Catechism of the old Presbyterian Church, the very first question is: <u>What is the chief end of man?</u> And the answer is simply: <u>The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.</u> And bless you, if that becomes the justification for your existence, then you can rest assured that you're living well, because no man glorifies God without doing it for the betterment of his fellow-men.

Pastor David very properly is leading a group of young people on Sunday nights on the general theme of Death and Dying. It's all quite popular these days, you know -- they've introduced courses on thanatology on college campuses. It used to be a forbidden subject -- we shied away from it. But now we're willing to come to grips with the fact that a man ought to learn how to die.

In the question-and-answer period that we had as I sat in for Pastor David last Sunday night, I took advantage of my relationship with the guest who was there, a highly esteemed friend and neighbor, a physician, and I rather awkwardly put to him this troublesome question: If it were within your power to choose the age at which you would die, how long would you want to live? I caught the intent of his answer very easily, and he did answer exceptionally well - - he's in his 60's, but we were given clearly to understand that he's not ready to terminate it yet. In private conversation with him I learned that he believes that to a degree he's coming into his greater usefulness -- he has a handle on life that he didn't have before -- he's able to assess it in a way that he couldn't assess it before. And all of this is simply to suggest that all other things being equal, we do crave to live a bit longer.... ...and longer....and longer. And unless there's the translation of the physical frame, and the denial of our mental faculties, who wants to check in tomorrow?

And yet I ask myself, and there's nothing morbid about it at all -- if tonight God would require my soul, if for today God would say, this is the end, and you don't have a tomorrow - - how could you make your exit? With a clear conscience, thanks to the grace of God? Could you honestly believe that you had lived meaningfully, with whatever years God had given you?

Today a week ago the mother of our Lesson Reader celebrated the 80th anniversary of her birth. They had a celebration for her, as well they should. Having been given advance word, I was numbered among those who could write her a

letter. Thursday, this was her reply, "My 80th birthday was another one (underlined) of God's special blessings bestowed upon me. My Lord has indeed remembered me all along the way these many years, and it is difficult for me to find words to adequately praise Him. But I am confident that He knows the thoughts of my heart, even if I am unable to express them. I am thinking of the Master's words, recorded in Luke 6:38 - - 'Give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and running over shall men give into your bosom' . . . " And this is her concluding statement: "I have experienced this abundant measure from my Lord."

As long as the God-factor - - - as long as the eternal dimension is evidenced at any age, one lives well, whether short or long. Poor Methuselah, he lived to a ripe old age.....and when it was all over, the only thing they could say about him was that he died. When you and I end our earthly pilgrimage, do you suppose they might be able to say anything at all about the way we lived?

.....now, you think about that.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fifth Sunday of Easter April 27, 1975

Organ Dedication

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord, who has placed in our heart the song of the redeemed. Amen.

And now the text . . . naturally from that book of praise, the Psaltery itself, the second verse of Psalm 146:

> "While I live will I praise the Lord; I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being."

You won't mind if I wax reckless a bit and give you a free translation? - - "As long as I am alive I'll have nothing but good things to say about God, no matter what happens to me, no matter where I may be, you can count on one thing: I'll give praise to God - - and I'll do it as long as I breathe."

Come now, let me ask you the question, how long has it been since you ever heard anybody talk like that? If I were a gambling man I'd be willing to wager that some folks, either inside the Faith or outside the Faith, would say, "Come off of it! - - you really don't mean that, do you? Are you willing to say that no matter what happens, you'll always think about God kindly, come wind or weather? - - You're not just saying that because it's a day as bright and beautiful as this one, and you're being carried away with enthusiasm?" .....I ask you the question again, how long has it been since you heard anybody get excited about God? -- beyond this place, or when people have gathered for worship.

I've seen, in television if not actually, how people can rise to their feet and yell and shout when the star-of-stars in the football stadium does something spectacular.....or when there's one home run hit after another -- I

can even feel the thrill of it now, as I've seen others be thrilled by it. How often do you see people getting excited about God?

They tell me there was a time when there were generations who got excited about God. He was central in their life. He dominated their thinking. Bless my mother of sainted memory -- stemming from Middle-Eastern stock as she did . . . I don't know of anything that ever happened in her life but what she didn't turn to God and say thank-you -- she was that kind of a women. With that simple mind of hers she even led me to believe as a child -- can you imagine this -- that those chicks that we had in our back yard, every time they ate or drank, they lifted their necks and their heads, she said, heavenward! - - to thank God for their simple fare. But she, they tell me, was of another generation.

Those who are in a position to know as they survey the scene tells us that our generation has put God to the periphery, that He no longer dominates our thinking....that if we should think of God, we think of Him to take Him to task for some untoward event. Yesterday morning some of us spent a very profitable two hours in a committee meeting. The gentleman who was our host conducted the devotions. Among other things he said, "I want to talk to you about the new idolatry" - - the new idolatry? - - as he indicated to us the new idolatry is man, when he does think of God, taking Him to task for not exercising better judgment over the world, presumably for which He has some concern.....and if God doesn't act as we think He ought to act in our interests, then we take Him to task, and we propose a better way by which He might have handled the situation. There are some people who when they think of God, think of Him only at such times and in such manner. But not so this Psalmist. The Psalmist says, "While I live -- while I breathe, I'll give God praise."

Among the books that I have on my shelves that go back some 30 years ago, is a book entitled "The Lost Radiance of The Christian Religion." As

far back as three decades ago there were those who were concerned lest even Christianity itself lack luster and its flame begin to grow dim. Could that have happened to you?

Lois Schuetzler, bless her soul -- she's the one responsible for that exceedingly well-done cover that you have for today's souvenir program....with her gifts and skills, suppose she were to stand here right now and make a photographic study of your face. What would it reveal? Would your face indicate a measure of serenity? Would your face indicate a measure of radiance? Could anyone detect, looking at you, that you are God-conscious -- that God is the dominating force in your life?

My heart was strangely troubled not long ago when I discussed the marriage service with a couple who thought they would maybe be married in Saint Luke. And so I went over very carefully the Order for Holy Matrimony, and as some of you may remember, God enters very largely into that ritual -- we keep referring to Him again and again. And that couple gave me to understand that they weren't about to appreciate that ritual, because they couldn't quite see how God had anything to do with their pledging devotion to each other. And I said to myself silently, I should live so long, to hear someone talk like that!

I'm not trying to be cynical -- God forbid! -- and I don't know what it is perhaps that they could have reached that point in their lives where they could have reasoned that way, unless it is symptomatic of so many. I also have another book on my shelves that bears the title: "The Eternal Dimension" and the author shows it not bec-use the eternal dimension seems to be present in our lives, the God-factor, that is -- but because it seems to be lacking. And with all the strength that I can command I have this to say to you: when God goes out of our lives we don't have much left to sing about! Of all the religions known to the mind of man, none gives greater cause for

rejoicing than the Christian faith properly understood.

Why could this man say "I will praise the Lord as long as I live"? Reason #1: He believed in God. He lived his life on the basis of the eternal dimension! There is a power over and above and beyond him, and beyond him! And whenever he thought of that he had a light in his eye. Leo Tolstoy, none other than he, tells that at 50 years of age life had gone sour on him, and he was about to reject belief in God. For almost two years he wrestled with himself. He even admits that he would hide rope, lest in moments of despair he would take the rope and hang himself from the rafters in the attic. But one day he went walking and tried to reason with himself why he should give up belief in God....and then, he says, every time he thought of God there was a sudden up-surge of energy that possessed his soul, and a spring came into his step.

This is what belief in God does for us: it lifts us beyond our despair. And religion, properly understood . . . you know your Latin, don't you? -- religio, religionis: to be bound by, to be held by - - - the man who believes in God is being held by someone over and above and beyond him, and whom we Christians call the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And when a man believes in God, he always has a destination. There's a goal, there's an objective in life. For the Christian, properly understood, Heaven is his destination. This is what he's being drawn toward! And he never really learns how to live on earth until he reflects the very nature and the quality of his destination.....

> ....show me a man who is on his way to meet his beloved -- no foot-dragger he! -- but a whistle on his lips, and a song in his heart! -- being drawn toward this happy destination....

Every time we Christians come together we remind ourselves of the eternal dimension. We talk about eternal life.

I don't pose as a scientist, I do not pose as a social psychologist, clinical or otherwise, and surely I would not pretend to be a psychiatrist. I am a simple pastor, who for almost 35 years God has given to me the privilege to listen in on human hearts. And every now and then I discover the dismay that some people know because they become disoriented. They're not being drawn toward anything over and above and beyond themselves. They're not pursuing God's dream and God's objective. Which leads me to think of a very simple story, almost like Aesop Fable, of the hunter who went out one day with nothing in particular in mind, when he saw a deer, and he said, "I'll go after the deer"....and as he went after the deer he saw a fox, and then he gave his attention to the fox and he pursued the fox for a while....and then after a bit a rabbit crossed his path, and he went after the rabbit.....he pursued the rabbit for a while, and then he saw a pheasant, and after the pheasant he went.....and before he knew it, darkness had settled in and he had nothing to show when day was ended.....

....they tell me there are people like that, who spend the days of their years not pursuing any one noble objective.

But when a man believes in God, properly understood, he's always being drawn by God. Properly understood, I don't think there is any such thing as a disoriented Christian. For thanks to the grace of God, when a Christian gets off the path it is only temporary, because God comes to him through the Holy Spirit. God is always making a gracious overture toward us. God is always coming to us, God is always reminding us: you're not meant to go to Hell. You're meant for Heaven - - and I've stamped on you the mark of the redeemed!

.....now that's something to sing about!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Sixth Sunday of Easter May 4, 1975

"ABOUT PRAYER"
(Matthew 6:7)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I want to think very informally with you this morning about a subject that's very dear to my heart, and I dare say, quite significant to many of you, if not all of you. It's the subject of prayer.

And yet I hasten to say at the very beginning there are times when I'm not quite certain where some of you may be in your thinking regarding prayer. I suppose this was triggered in a very real way for me some weeks back when during the Lenten season we conducted those very helpful Bible study sessions on Wednesday morning and again on Wednesday evenings. I can still hear the echo of her voice as we were about to end one of those sessions, when during a question-and-answer period she posed the question, and I thought rather pathetically, that is, I thought I detected pathos in her voice - - her question was this: "Does it really do any good to pray?"

> ...and then she cited an example or two which, I presume, prompted her to ask the question and to indicate in the tone of her voice that as she remembered those examples, that maybe in those cases it really didn't do much good to pray. And as a result, the question was now being applied generally.....

Could it be that in your thinking, wittingly or unwittingly we've outgrown the need to pray, if we should ask the question, does it really do any good to pray?

here was a time in the life of the early Church when the early Church

was sustained and nurtured by prayer. They simply could not exist without it.....

> ...one thinks of the life of Jesus Christ, and I dare you to think of Jesus Christ as anything less than a Man of Prayer.....

But there are those who tell me that His day was so different from ours -- we are the enlightened ones, we are the literate ones - - we have at our fingertips' control the powers and the forces of the universe. We are even able to dam the forces of nature.

Now in the day of Jesus Christ, sure you'll admit that prayer was real for Him then because you may be inclined to think that life was so different in His day. When people became ill, as an example, they had no trained medical men, they had no nurses to whom they could turn as we know registered nurses. They had no physicians, general practitioners or specialists ready to meet their need. So what did they do? They prayed.

I remember my father, of blessed memory, telling me about his mother, my paternal grandmother -- a woman that I never met, but in whose debt I will remain to the day I die for a spiritual heritage. My father told me how they lived in that little village beyond the slopes of Beirut overlooking that magnificent city and the shores of the Mediterranean.....and his brother had become ill with the fever (maybe you may remember my having told you this)

> ....and immediately when she discovered how serious his physical condition was, she got down on her hands and knees and crawled from where they lived to the village church...where she presumably prostrated herself in humility before Almighty God, and in an act of devotion she lit a candle and offered a prayer, throwing herself completely upon the mercy and the power and the grace of God.....

....it was just like a page out of the Bible, because

with so great reverence and respect my father told me that when she got home, the fever was gone! - - the crisis was over! - - in a day when they didn't have medical facilities readily available, you might say people prayed.

But nowadays, we go quickly to the medicine cabinet, we get out the family doctor book, we call the physician . . . we make a trip to the emergency room of the hospital . . . . and maybe the only time we think of praying is when the preacher looms on the horizon. And if he's worth his salt, of course, he won't leave without asking a prayer, whether it's on your agenda or not. But I dare say that paternal grandmother of mine that I never met, were she living today, I'm reasonably certain that she'd take full advantage of the antibiotics, I am reasonably certain that she would ask for the physician.....but if I understand her aright, I am also reasonably certain that she would still pray, she would not have allowed herself to believe that she had outgrown the need to pray, just because we have these things available.

I smile to myself broadly, of course I do, and you will, perchance, when I relate for you the story of the four Methodist bishops who were winging their way across the Atlantic Ocean.....and one of them presumably a wit, said to the stewardess as she passed by, "When you next see the captain, tell him not to worry -- there are four Methodist bishops aboard this plane, and every one of us is a praying man!" When she reappeared, the Methodist bishop said, "What did the captain say?" And her reply was, "He said if it's all the same to you, he'd just as well have four good engines!" And this is the kind of age in which we live, you see. We recognize the need to be alert, we recognize the need to use our brains, and then control the things that are within our control. But pray? Maybe wittingly or unwittingly we permit ourselves to think that we've outgrown the need to pray.

And then I have to hasten quickly to say to some of you that maybe you don't pray for this reason: you're not so sure that you're gifted enough in the art of praying. Maybe you permit yourself to think that you need a peculiar kind of endowment, that God has given only to certain people spiritual sensitivity. And so maybe you're neglecting praying because you're perfectly content to let other people pray for you....

> ....here again I continue to smile broadly - - it takes me back all of those years when I began my ministry. It was my first confirmation class, and one day when the class was ending the sweet little thing came to me and said, "I have to tell you something that happened to my father at the hospital" . . . . well, let me relate it for you. He was a simple-minded chap, and in those days in the men's ward on the second floor in the Williamsport Hospital we had a character who'd appear every now and then. He was bearded, dark piercing eyes, and I don't mean it unkindly, he was a Bible clutcher. And for some people it looked as though Jesus had come back in modern garb. And he'd stand alongside of a patient's bed, and then in a very sanctimonious tone he'd say: "Can I pray for you?"
> ....and this sweet thing in my confirmation class told me all about this, and she said, "You know what my dad said to him? - - my dad said, 'No, thank you -- I have a young preacher over on the South Side and he does all my praying for me.'" And as I recall that incident I'm inclined to think maybe there was more truth in that statement than we'd care to admit. We're perfectly willing to let somebody else do all our praying for us.

I refer to it, mark you, as the great and wonderful Roman Catholic Church, and I'm not about to condemn them. but maybe they've contributed to it. They

talk a great deal about the intercession of the saints. They talk a great deal about having the saints pray for us. They even exalt and venerate Mary, the Blessed Mother, and encourage people to pray, if not to Mary, then through Mary -- believing that she had a kind of access to the Throne of Grace that other people didn't have. Maybe you're like that, when you find yourself going to other people and believing that their fervent praying will be more effective than yours.

O don't get me wrong, don't hesitate to ask some of us to pray for you. The Biblical admonition is that we ought to pray for one another as well as pray with one another. But let's level back again -- if this is where perchance you could be in your thinking regarding prayer, that you've outgrown it, or you've neglected the habit of it because you're willing to let other people do the praying for you, then let me tell you that you're shortchanging yourself, and you're shortchanging the church, you're shortchanging your family. Jesus Christ prayed, and Jesus Christ intended that we should pray. In fact, those who were near and dear to Him believed this about Him, that His life was so different just because He prayed.

I was numbered among those who sat captivated by the Frog Prince yesterday afternoon and as I came last evening, when Merton the Magician wants to talk about a riddle or a joke.....and then Merton the Magician tells them: "How many faces do children have?".....and then very cleverly they dealt with that theme. I mused as I went to bed last night.....how many faces did Jesus Christ have? Jesus Christ has more than one face, and the most wonderful of all the faces characteristic of Jesus Christ is the face of the Man of Prayer. And I submit to you, you have never really seen Jesus Christ until you recognize Him as the Man who prayed.

Forever I'll be indebted to the fact that the church in which I grew up in that small town had a reproduction of Henrich Hofmann's "Christ in the Garden of

Gethsemane" on His knees.....and when my mind would wander during the preaching of the sermon, and when I couldn't perhaps appreciate the high quality of the anthem, the language of the hymns was so clothed in terms that I couldn't understand - - - my mind would go again and again to that interpretation of Jesus Christ on His knees.

You never really understand Him until you recognize Him as the Man of Prayer. And He's the one who said to us, "Without me you can do nothing." And He's the one who gave us an example of praying. And He is the one who responded to the request that we should be taught to pray.

Your prayer life can be far more effective then it is, if you think it's ineffective. It's the one thing given to every single one of us that we can be able to do. Some of us can't sing in the choir, some of us can't teach a Sunday School class, some of us can't serve in positions of leadership. But every single one of you can pray - - "More things are wrought by prayer" -- says Tennyson -- "than this old world dreams of".....and this I most certainly believe.

Now let me suggest several things for you that could hold you in good stead. First, recapture for yourself all over again the blessed thought that God exists, and because He does exist, He's interested in this world, and in you as a person. And because He's interested in you as a person, you can pray. He will hear it. Begin on that premise.

And then in your waking moments of the day, try to anticipate what the day may bring. Some of you may have trouble getting out of bed when you realize the wide spectrum of what could lie ahead of you, but brace yourself for it! The day could bring some new-found joy! The day could open some whole new arena in your life in which you may be called upon to act. The day may bring you some grievous burden to carry - - - anticipate that! Accept that it could happen! And then say, "Dear God, I can't face it without Your help. Help me to believe that You're going to be readily available - - " And then as the day continues,

blurt out a prayer every now and then...."Thank you, God!"....."Help me, God."

My mind goes back to that day when I walked away from an empty grave (by empty I mean waiting to be filled by the vault).....we had lowered the body of a loved one into it.....we walked away.....and I, realizing full well what was ahead for her, can now understand what she was saying when by her side we walked away and she simply said: "God! . . . God! . . . " - - that's the prayer of helplessness, and surrender.

Really now, it's quite a simple thing when you come to think of it. And folks who get all humg-up on trying to figure out a way to make prayer become effective would do well to realize that God doesn't much care whether our prayers are long or short; formal or informal; logical or illogical; elegant or awkward. What counts with Him is that they be sincere. The life of this parish is being transformed, I'm happy to tell you, because there are people who are learning to pray as they've never prayed before. You're either one of them, or you could be one of them.

And now the text for this sermon. I've reserved it for this very moment, the words of our Blessed Lord:

> "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words . . . "

I hope this sermon . . . well, I hope you'll find it helpful.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - the Rev. Raymond Shaheen
Sunday After The Ascension May 11, 1975

"THE CHRISTIAN HOME"
- - They Also Serve Who Rebuke

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from
God our Father and from Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Fully cognizant of the fact that today is the second Sunday in May, a day that's being increasingly observed not only as Mother's Day but also as the day that celebrates the Festival of the Christian Home. And when I come to this sacred desk this morning I am also aware of the fact that any sermon that's being preached ought always to be Biblically based, Scripturally sound, that is, and hopefully relevant - - that the Scriptural truth being interpreted might attune itself to the mind and the mood of the day.

Therefore, fully realizing what is happening to the home across the nation these days, and perhaps in many parts of the world, and also recognizing the change in life styles, etc., a number of different sermon titles came to my mind, and a number of different thoughts were triggered. Perhaps you would be interested in knowing some of the things that I did consider preaching about today, realizing that one out of four people, that is one out of every four families, moves perhaps at least once a year . .

...thinking in terms of mohility, I did consider the sermon title: "Three For The Road" -- which would have been a case study in Mary and Joseph and Jesus as they left Bethlehem and traveled toward Egypt....a study in mobility as we remember the Holy Family in searching a settling-down place....

...and maybe you'll be interested in knowing that when I put my finger upon the pulsebeat of those who are entering later adolescence and young adulthood, and all the apparent uneasiness

and unsettlement that characterize their day, I thought of this sermon title: "Jesus -- Long Hair And Sandals".....as one could prepare himself to deal with the nuances and the subtleties and the inferences.....that could have been a study in life-styles as we deal with those who reject certain values of the Establishment....

...would you believe it, I was tempted to ring the changes and to preach a good old Mother's Day sermon, and had I done that, here's the title: "Mary, Model For Mothers".....and that sermon would have been a study in support of those who place a high value on virginity as they anticipate and prepare for the marriage bed....

...one hears a great deal these days about natural childbirth, and maybe I could have been bold enough to preach a sermon entitled, "Virgin Birth".....or a closer look at what happened that night in a cattle shed -- a study in natural childbirth.....

...they tell me that last year in Montgomery County alone there were more than 1700 runaways, restless youngsters who are looking for something that they didn't have at home. Could I have been daring enough, and would you have been daring enough to allow me to choose a sermon title such as this, as you remember what happened in Jerusalem, when Jesus was on the brink of becoming a teenager - - that sermon title would have been: "Jesus, The Case of The Missing Boy" - - a study in Those Who Presumably Need More Than What The Home Apparently is Providing, And Get Caught Up In What They Think is To Be Found Elsewhere . . .

...being aware of the fact that the Christian home must recognize the role of the father, I could have come up with this one, a

simple title: "Joseph: Good Father" - - a study in those who bring the divine perspective into the role they've been meant to simply and sublimely fulfill, a sermon that would be meant to benefit those who have yet to learn what a grand and noble thing it is to be a father.

....or I also considered this as a possibility, knowing what's happening to the home today -- this title: "That Home In Nazareth" ...and it would basically have been a study in values, and there would have been brought to our attention all the things we don't need, we who place so high a value upon possessions and things -- all the things we don't need in order to bring up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Well, I passed by all of these in order to preach another sermon, realizing again that a sermon should be Scripturally sound and relevant. The title may surprise you. It's the last thing that perhaps many of you might think that I would have chosen to discuss on the second Sunday in May: "THE CHRISTIAN HOME" - - subtitle: "They Also Serve Who Rebuke." And the text: from the 27th chapter of the Book of Proverbs, the 5th verse:

"Better a frank word of reproof than
the love that will not speak."

Now you're entitled to know why the thrust of this sermon, and why I feel in duty bound to share it with you this morning. For over 35 years now God has allowed me to be a pastor, and as a pastor I conduct, to all intents and purposes, a confessional, because that's really what my study is on occasion, when people come to talk to me about some of the things that trouble them greatly. If the walls of my study could echo and re-echo, you might hear something like this: the sad lament of the teenager, "Pastor, if only my parents would get off my back" - - - or it could be the words of a husband: "Pastor,

I'm married to a nagging woman - - from the time I get up in the morning until the time I go to bed at night it's nag, nag, nag . . . "

...or it could be the words of a wife: "Pastor, I can't cope with it any longer. He's always finding fault. Nothing that I do pleases him - - even the way I walk across the room can irritate him."

And then I walk away and I reflect, and honestly now, I think on occasion I can understand why there's the nag, nag, nag, and I can understand why the parents rebuke and reprove and don't quite let up, and I can also understand why there's the fault-finding. Knowing some people as I do, I can recognize the justification for it. But the problem is this: how to dish it out properly, how to rebuke wisely? - - how to reprove in an acceptable manner? And not only that, how to learn to take it? Reproof, rebuke, are some of the basic ingredients out of which the sturdy stuff of life is fashioned.

Did it ever occur to you that in God's plan for the Christian family, that He had this in mind, that within the circle of those who love us we could be reproved, and rebuked, just because they are exercising a God-given obligation. Now don't get me wrong, I have a perfectly happy home life. But I would be less than honest if I didn't tell you that on occasion she cuts me down to size! She's mastered the art quite well, and I love her for it. Because you're also entitled to know that there's an occupational hazard in the ministry. People usually are polite to us. Generally speaking, they say nice things to us and pat us on the back. And sometimes they do us a disservice . . . now for heaven's sake, don't get me wrong -- this is no invitation to you to go overboard! But within the Christian family we're reluctant at times to speak the word of rebuke or reproof, just because people may not understand us. But there is such a thing as speaking the truth, in love, and because we love them.

I remember those several summers ago when we had that delightful holiday

in England and Scotland, and we were having dinner in that very gracious dining room at Gleneagles....and my eye wandered around the dining room when all of a sudden they fell upon a young man, shabbily-dressed, I dare say, a bit unkempt, and wearing a soiled sweatshirt. And these were the words emblazoned on that sweatshirt: I'M ALLERGIC TO CRITICISM. Well the more I looked at him, the more I thought to myself, well, you've probably had your share of it, brother! And then it also occurred to me what a field day the historian of the future can have when he looks back upon our day and tries to interpret the psychologic and sociologic phenomena, the clues we're giving him, the graffiti, the bumper stickers, the buttons, and the slogans and the legends that appear on sweatshirts.

Said the writer of the Book of Proverbs: "Better a frank word of reproof than the love that will not speak." Some of us rise up and thank God for people who took us to task. Whatever lessons I have learned in life I have learned from those who not only have encouraged me when perhaps some good thing was being done, but also most certainly from those who have rebuked me and have reproved me.

You know it's quite the thing these days to have group therapy and sensitivity groups. I am old enough to be able to smile when I think of them, because I also know the purpose that they're intended to serve. You're supposed to reach a certain point where you can feel perfectly free to pounce upon the other people, and to rebuke him. In that moment of enlightenment he'll get to see himself as he really is. People pay perfectly good money to be told off!.....and I smile broadly because I was one of six kids, and when I was growing up with those five brothers and sisters we had group therapy every day! We were always telling one another off, and I dare say it served a useful purpose. And I'm not free from it even to this day when I go back home. Let me say again to you, I do believe in God's plan for the family. He expects us to

mature and to grow and to develop. And part of growing up is receiving the corrective.

Will we ever learn how to do it? Will we ever recognize that it ought to be done? Wittingly or unwittingly, sometimes we think that rebuke or reproof is something that belongs only to those who don't like us. But I say to you with whatever strength I can command, because we love people we owe it to them -- in the right way and at the right time -- to speak the word of reproof. Again let the text be read: "Better a frank word of reproof than the love that will not speak."

Dr. Ernest T. Campbell, the Pastor of Riverside Church in Manhattan once tells about a friend of his who went to Daytona Beach. It was the time of the year when the students, you see, from the north descended there on a spring holiday. They let everything out -- completely uninhibited. The preacher's friend was walking down the beach and he happened to see a chap coming toward him, wearing a sweatshirt -- he thought he knew what it said. But as the fellow got near to him he put his hands in cross-fashion, like this, so as to obliterate the slogan. The preacher's friend was able to detect part of a word -- VIRG -- and then he said to him, "Ah, you're from the University of Virginia, are you?" And the fellow said, "No." And then the preacher-friend said, "Well, if you don't mind, why don't you drop your hands and your arms and let me see for myself what it says." And rather sheepishly the fellow did. And this was the slogan on that sweatshirt: HELP STAMP OUT VIRGINITY.

The preacher's friend stared him in the eye. The chap was somewhat troubled - - he did have a measure of integrity. The preacher's friend walked away.....and the chap turned around and followed him, and said, "I suppose you want me to take this sweatshirt off and throw it away, don't you?" And the preacher's friend said, "No, I have something else in mind. I'll tell you what you ought to do. You go straight home with that sweatshirt and take

it off...and then you get it dry-cleaned....and then you put it in a plastic case. Because you look like a likeable chap, honestly you do, and you ought to make out well. And one of these days when you're finished in college you're going to get married, and I believe you'll probably have several children, one of whom could be a gracious, charming daughter. And I suggest to you that when she's sixteen and she goes out on her first date, you go to that plastic case and get this sweatshirt, and give it to her to wear on her first date."

> ...have you any idea how the young man responded? Much to the credit of both of them, he said, "If my father would have spoken to me like that, I would never have worn this shirt in the first place."

But you see, there's a tendency on the part of many of us not to rebuke or reprove. We may be shocked, or we may smile and walk away. But there comes a time when we have to speak up, if the corrective is to be made. Some of us shy away from the responsibility, and some of us, I have to tell you rather quickly, when we do exercise it, are pretty awkward at it - - we're self-righteous. The late Archbishop William Temple cut some of us to the quick when he said that it is possible to be morally right repulsively. And that's something, too, we need to remember.

Well, this is my sermon to you today when we think of the Christian family. It also serves when it masters the fine art of rebuking. And on good authority, don't you forget it -- for if you read the New Testament all over again as though you had never read it before you'll discover much to your amazement how frequently Jesus Christ was cutting people down to size! - - how again and again He rebuked His disciples, in order that they might grow and develop.

> ....now you think about this for a little while . . .

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

SPIRIT OF GOD, Descend anew upon our hearts and make us sensitive to the preaching and the teaching of Thy Holy Word. Through Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord, who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

Of the making of bumper stickers seemingly there is no end. By this time you have some idea of how I feel about them. I am no proponent of them, and I will admit that it took a bit of doing until I finally got around, in duty bound I presume, to putting a Somebody Cares sticker on that little black bug that I use to scoot around from home to hospital.

I presume I'd be less than candid if I didn't tell you that I find some bumper stickers quite offensive and they irritate me because they seem to claim me as a captive audience as I tag along behind the car in front of me, unable to pass. But on the other hand there are some bumper stickers that I find quite amusing, and quite clever. And if I were to give the award for the bumper-sticker-of-the-week right now, I'd nominate that very clever one that I saw - - only one of its kind that I've seen:

GOD'S BACK - - AND HE SURE IS MAD

Do you suppose you could relate that to the Epistle Lesson for today? I have. I'm thinking in terms of a group of people who were told by their Blessed Lord to stay put. Which they did. And they were promised that He would re-appear. Now today celebrates the fact that God came back to them -- if we may put it that way. Now let's clearly understand something because I want to warn you -- this is a rather unconventional interpretation of the Day of Pentecost, but, I pray, not unorthodox. Unconventional perhaps -- yes.

Think of it this way: fifty days had come and gone since they had last seen Jesus Christ in one of those frequent appearances following the resur-

rection. For 49 days, that's seven weeks, plus one, they huddled together, a group of people. They were lying low, they were keeping cool....they had withdrawn.

Now whenever people clustered together closely for 50 days, I have a suspicion that after a while they got on one another's nerves. I have a feeling that after a while they looked back and they tried to figure what it was that went wrong. After all, He did trust them. After all, He did make an investment in them. But right there, in their number, was as I suppose as one of them may have said,"Mr. Big-Mouth himself" - -

- - Peter, you know, who was always spouting off and saying how wonderful it was going to be because his Lord could always count on him. But he is the man who petered out, you know. When the chips were down, he wasn't there. And even the Good Book records how three different times he denied his Master.....

- - think what a field day they must have had as they clustered together on top of one another, waiting this time as they were told to wait, and they thought in terms of Judas Iscariot -- the betrayer, who wasn't there, of course, to defend himself if defence he could have mustered. Think how they tore him to bits.....

Then when they looked at one another accusingly -- well honestly now, I can't picture them having one continuous prayer meeting for fifty days. I think they must have had their moments of weakness when they let loose at one another. I think they must have had their days when they were trying to figure out what it was that went wrong, and that's all they talked about.

Now according to the Scriptures: "The day of Pentecost had fully come---"

What happened? Something terrific happened! It was fantastic! The text for this brief meditation puts it this way, the 2nd verse of the 2nd chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles:

> "The sound like the rushing of a
> mighty wind . . . "

...I'd say something of volcanic proportions -- no gentle spring breeze, no soft zephyr - - - the rush of a mighty wind -- God's back--and He made quite a to-do of it....they were confounded, they were shaken up. They didn't know for a while what hit them. They walked around and used such words as "We were bewildered . . . we were amazed . . . " People came in from all sides and wanted to know what was going on. God's back--- put it that way. And if you want to say it: God's back -- and He sure is mad!

> ....as much as to say, you've had enough time huddled together. You've spent enough time withdrawn from the world. You've spent enough time trying to figure out what went wrong. You've spent enough time naval-gazing. Now let's get with it! Out there is a world to be saved! Put your words into action -- demonstrate your love! Get with it! . . . . . .

Would you be willing to accept that? Orthodox or unorthodox, conventional or unconventional, there's a truth inherent that I for one cannot ignore, that God has a way of coming back to us and stirring us up, shaking us up, and saying, "Now get with it!"

If I were the manufacturer of bumper stickers, I wouldn't settle for the one: GOD'S BACK - AND HE SURE IS MAD. I'd go on to say:

GOD'S BACK - - AND HE'S HERE TO STAY

- - He's taken over! - - He's in complete command!

That's comforting, isn't it? God comes back to us. He doesn't keep himself away from us forever. And when He comes back He takes over. He gave

the orders that day - - He compelled them, He sent them out. Not only that, when God comes back, He comes back to stay in order to stick with us and give us everything that we need, in order that we may persevere with patience the course which is ours yet to run.

And that's a grand and glorious thought. God doesn't send us out into the world without the assurance that He'll go with us and stick with us. And that, I think, is the message that God is giving to the Christian church -- again and again and again. And I'm willing to ask you to think that every time you come to church, it's like Pentecost all over again. It's like the Spirit of God coming to us anew.

I would like to think that every time we come together in this place the Spirit of God draws us here, nurtures us -- we're given to understand that God is still in charge of His world, that God still has a dream, a plan, a scheme, a blueprint - - - God still has some line of action. By the time the service is over and the Benediction has been pronounced, He's saying, "Now get with it! - - Go out there - - Do something!" And whenever that happens, it has explosive properties, it's like dynamite.

The older I become the more thrilled I become with the way things begin to happen once God is given a chance to be in command. This I most certainly believe.

Now I am happy to tell you that this is also a day of recollection. And Pastor David and I, after deliberate study, have agreed that as long as we're privileged to be associated with you we can't think of a Pentecost coming or going without having the congregation being given a chance to re-affirm their Confirmation vows, that on a day such as this we might look back and remember at that time and in that place where we gave our life to the Lord.....where we were perfectly content to allow the Lord to take over, to become our Master, and where we said we'd be His obedient follower.

Well, for some of us the days, the years, have passed quickly, and we need to go back and remembee what we said, and the promise that was made to us. So on this day I'm renewing my Confirmation vows, Pastor David is renewing his. We ask you now to join with us. . . .

> In the Name of the Lord Jesus, Who is the great King and Head of the Church, whom on another occasion you promised to love and to serve, I ask you now to look back and to remember the ardor of your devotion at that time and the noble intention that claimed you. And as you look back and you remember, will you on this day commit yourself all over again to Him so that He may have dominant sway in your life? If so, answer: I commit myself anew.
>
> (I commit myself anew)

In the Name of the Lord Jesus, Who is the great King and Head of the Church I can promise to you that for the days that lie ahead He will continue to empower you, to strengthen you, to nurture you, to guide you, and to attend you. Amen.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday After Pentecost June 1, 1975

"IN THE TIME OF EXODUS"
(Exodus 12:34)

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

When our Assistant Pastor was about the age that his eldest son has now reached, there was the new name that came into his life with which he had to deal. The name was Ernestine Krastin. You ought to know a little bit about her. She was literally dumped on our doorstep when we lived at 324 Howard Street in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

Winifred and I, a few short years before that, had been in Europe, and we had come to understand firsthand the situation which some of the refugees after World War II were forced to leave. And because of our knowledge of the situation, a family down the road in the country had sponsored a refugee family, and Ernestine was numbered among them. But they couldn't cope with Ernestine, and they didn't know how to handle her.

She had been a domestic overseas, in Latvia. She couldn't speak the language. I suppose when she came to us she was 59 or 60 years of age, and the day before Thanksgiving literally dumped on our doorstep. The family who brought her simply went away, and all that Ernestine had was what she was wearing. That was our first introduction to the refugee problem.

And then, so it seemed, for several years that parsonage was like a grand hotel. I wish I could list for you the number of different people who stayed with us. One of them -- Alexander Kurilenko. You would have liked him very much. He had all the earmarks of a perfect gentleman. Russian by birth, he had gone to Estonia....then when the Communists came -- listen now! -- they came to the front door....he went out the back door. Just as simple as that. No suitcase, no time to say farewell. All that he had, on his feet,

on his back.

When Winifred and I were in Africa these few short years ago, we met a man, a Britisher, who had been a journalist with the BBC. Moved by Christian commitment, he wanted to do his bit in Africa. So he went to Uganda. Then General Amin had that expulsion tirade, you know, which is still going on -- foreigners were asked to leave. He was told that he would have to go within 24 hours and all that he could take with him -- no money -- but all that he could take with him was what he could put in a suitcase. These are the children of the exodus -- the people who on short notice may have to move out into a whole new world, a world that's entirely different from any world that they have ever had before. And as they face it they have to travel lightly. There's so little that they can take with them.

One of these days, it could be this week, I don't know -- Bob Andersen, who was here at 8:30, a member of the Committee on Social Ministry, he'll be going down to the bus terminal or National Airport to meet some people that he's never met before. Chances are they won't be able to speak English.... maybe one of the family might be able to speak a little English.....and all that they'll have will be what they're wearing.....children of the exodus.

You may recall from the newsreels that you saw on television...

> ...the jeep is leaving the compound of the American Embassy...
> the Vietnamese run after it, hoping to catch a ride
> ...airplanes are leaving the airport...they run across the
> field -- hoping to get on before it takes off....

....what do they have? Nothing. Except what they're wearing. They are children of the exodus.

Little did I realize when I was planning the series of sermons to be preached in this church last year at this time - - you know that's my custom

before I go on my vacation, I have to put down on paper the direction in which I think we ought to go, in our preaching and in our other activity in the course of the year. So the sermons are plotted from September to June.

> ...little did I realize last year at this time that when today would come, when this sermon would be preached, that it would be as relevant as all this! For listen now to the sermon title: "IN THE TIME OF EXODUS." Listen now to the text, the 34th verse of the 12th chapter of the Book of Exodus:
>
> "So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their mantles on their shoulders . . ."

....from one generation to another, always the thousands upon thousands who are the sons and the daughters of the children of the exodus, who when the time to leave comes, they must leave quickly. And the Children of Israel could not so much as take time to bake their bread. Even before the dough was leavened, they got up, they left and went out into a new world in which they were called to live.

Now before every man there comes an open door into a larger and fuller life. It could well be that the precise moment for entering through it will leave little precious time for accumulating an assortment of things. Fret not, my friend, when it is all said and done only the basics are necessary. Have you ever taken stock of the basics? Have you ever taken time to consider what it is that you really need most in order to live? If some strange fate came your way, and tomorrow morning at six o'clock you had to take to the road never again to return to the place where you now live, and you could take with you only what you could carry, think of all the things you'd leave behind which as of this moment you cherish, and you prize so highly.

This sermon this day is far more relevant than you may care to admit, my friend. Bear with me for a moment. Ed Anthony is a member of this congre-

gation. He's on the Public Relations staff of Pepco. Not long ago in his home he was telling a few of us who had gathered there how real the energy crunch actually is. And he gave some of us to understand that it could mean, in the forseeable future -- you got that, didn't you, the forseeable future -- that change in our life style, in our way of living -- a new world in which we'd be called to enter, so that figuratively speaking we could become the children of the exodus.

It's a fool's paradise in which some of us go on living, you know. We keep saying to ourselves, what with our American sophistication and our scientific know-how, we'll always have enough energy. Well, we'll see. But Tony tells me that the day could come when we'd be living in only a part of our houses, because we can't afford to heat the rest. Or on a day such as yesterday, or today or tomorrow, if we would run the air conditioner, it might be in only one room in the house, and we'd level off there with our existence.

> ...you can't think of it, can you, of getting down to living with just one car, instead of two or three?
>
> ...you can't think of it, can you, of sitting down and pondering whether you go to market to the shopping plaza today, or whether you sait until you find out from your neighbor's neighbor as to whether you can pool your resources and all of you go in one car?

...you can't think of living in that kind of a day, can you? But it could happen . . .

...or having to give up that dream home, you see, the second home? Well, what with the tax bite...inflation....unemployment...and a recession that could last longer than what we may care to admit to ourselves. The wartime economy, you see, has come and gone, to say nothing of other nations of the world who want their share of the good things of the earth and who could

by force take it away from us, you see.

What does that mean? It could mean that as we face that new world out there we'd have to travel lightly! And some of us have never thought about it that way.

I wonder if you'll understand me if I use a very personal illustration now. Grandma, God bless her, now living with us, 90 years of age - - she's facing another world out there. Everything she owns now can be put in one suitcase. By circumstances she's mastered the art of traveling lightly. She has no deed to any property on the face of this earth. And if I were to tell you what little she has in the bank, you'd be absolutely appalled. And because there is such a thing as old age assistance -- it's a paltry check that she receives -- but she's happy. She's learned the necessity of traveling light, because while all other things are being taken away, the inventory of the soul is pretty large. And essentially that's what matters most.

Oh, I forgot to tell you this a bit earlier in the sermon. There was a Christian out in Ceylon -- what's the name of that island now, the new name that it got some time ago?. . . . and as this Christian was traveling along on the train (I can visualize it, I've experienced it myself) -- packed, you see, every available seat taken, and people standing . . . and because people are so poor, if when you're asleep they could even steal the sandals off of your feet. Well bless this Christian's soul -- his earthly possessions as he moved from one place to another in that old brown beat-up satchell that he puts in the luggage rack above his head. But he's tired and he's weary and sleep overtakes him. But he fights sleep, you see, because every now and then he has to get awake to look up to see if that satchell is still there. So he sleeps only fitfully, trying to take care of those earthly possessions that he prizes.....only to get awake at four o'clock in the morning to discover that the satchell is gone. And then, he says, "From that moment

on I slept like a baby!" - - he no longer had to worry about what he wanted to hold on to, that could be taken away! And now it was gone.

We are the children of the exodus. God is always telling us about a new world that's waiting there for us to enter. And when the word comes to go, to face it, think of all the things that we prize that we don't have to take with us.

I'm wondering if you'd indulge me for a moment. I've told some of you this before. My father, at age 18, was also a son of the exodus, a refugee-of-sorts. And in Lebanon he was attracted by the brave new world which was America. So he asked his parents to do something that I'm not sure I could have taken from the two sons that we have: "Let me go!" His parents let him go.

They gathered together two hundred dollars to pay his passage. So he got on the steamer in the harbor at Beirut. I made a pilgrimage there once just for that reason, to stand there in the harbor and to re-live the time of his departure. For when he got on that steamer in 1902, late in the afternoon, they did not leave until the early hours of the next morning....as he walked the deck when darkness had settled in, he looked back to the hills of home, and there, miles up the hillside from Beirut, a flame against the background of the black night. His mother had dipped the branches of a cedar tree in oil and ignited them, and that was her farewell to her son of the exodus. All that he brought with him into the new world was what he could carry with his hands and what he could wear on his back. But what he needed most he still had -- a bit of courage, a generous portion of faith, and an abiding measure of love.

I have no idea of the kind of an exodus that you may be called upon to make, but I do know that these are the things that we need most. And yet the lamentable thing is, we spend most of our time and energy for the things in the time of exodus that we can't take with us....and really don't need.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday After Pentecost June 8, 1975

"A TOWEL IN HIS HAND"
(John 13:3-4)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ our Blessed Lord. Amen.

How accurate the report is I cannot tell you, but I have been told that when the Humble Oil Company wanted to switch over and form the Exxon Corporation, that they paid a handsome sum of money to a professional outfit to come up with the right kind of a name that might be appealing, easily recognizable, and that might from that moment constitute their trademark. All of this leads me to say to you, suppose you were charged with the responsibility of coming up with some kind of a symbol, some kind of a logo -- L-O-G-O. My friend Hallie Wright, our fellow member in the parish who is involved in publications at Catholic University has done this sort of thing for them. And sometimes she thinks that we in Saint Luke Church ought to have a distinctive symbol that is applicable to what we represent in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And suppose I were to say to you: Would you be willing to serve on a committee, not to find a trademark for Saint Luke but to think in terms of an alternate symbol for the Christian faith? You know, we are branded -- it's the cross that becomes the symbol of our Christian religion. Suppose you were to dismiss that from your mind and you were charged with the responsibility of suggesting a series of symbols that could easily identify what the Christian church stands for?

Now I know you haven't thought about this beforehand. Let me give you the benefit of some of the things which you would perhaps consider . . .

- - some of you might consider a symbol that would represent a pulpit and a Bible....because when you think of Jesus Christ, the founder of the Church, He did come preaching - -

and He opened up to people an understanding of God the like of which they'd never had before. So as He spent a great deal of His time interpreting recorded truth, and also opening for them new ways by which that truth could be relevant, maybe you'd settle for a symbol: Pulpit and Bible.

- - Some of you might be traditionalist enough, and you'd say let's go back to what the early Church did....we won't improve on them....and we'll settle for a Fish. Now, that was the symbol for the Christian Church in the early days, because as I understand it, the Greek word for fish is ichthus, and it also represents the acrostic related to the initials or the letters for the name of JESUS....and by that of course they made the sign of the Fish, and that related to the Christian believers.

- - some of you might think as an alternate choice you'd settle very easily for Bread and a Cup of wine . . . because Jesus Christ introduced that Sacrament which supercedes that ancient Passover for the Christian....and when you think of Bread and Wine you think of a new life that's given to us by Jesus Christ, by which we are nurtured and nourished.

Well, let your mind have free sway for a while, but whatever you do, listen to me now when I suggest one that you ought to take very, very seriously. In all likelihood you may never have thought of it -- a symbol that does become the Christian faith: a Towel.

Now you'll understand that when I read for you the text for today's sermon, the text that has triggered all of these thoughts, recorded as the 3rd and 4th verses of the 13th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

> "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God and would go to God, took a towel in his hands . . . "

Now you're entitled to a bit of historical perspective. Always go back when you read Scripture and try to appreciate as best you can the historical setting. Maybe I can help you now.

As I understand it -- a bit of speculation undoubtedly, but let me have that measure -- as I speculate, the word had gone out that Jesus Christ wanted to have a special session with His disciples. This was the last week that He spent with them.....this was to be the last night that He would spend with them, and He wanted to be with them and with them alone. He got the word out -- among the disciples -- they were to meet at an appointed time and in an appointed place, and they were going to have supper together and also to celebrate the Feast of the Passover.

He made arrangements with the host, and I suppose He may have indicated to the host, "If you don't mind, because of the nature of our meeting, we don't want any extra people around. You can be there to get things in order, but once we get there . . . " He may even have suggested that he could take his leave too. This was to be the night that Jesus would spend specifically with the disciple band.

Now when they would get there, you should also know that they were rather up-tight, because somewhere along the line they had an argument among themselves. Human as they were, after spending three years in this disciple company, some of them had rather grand notions about where they ought to be in relationship to one another. And so they were arguing among themselves as to who would be recognized as the greatest.

As they sat there, maybe Matthew had built in his own mind quite a case

for himself as to why he was the kind of person he was, what progress he had made in the Christian faith, and why perhaps he had an edge over the others. I'm inclined to think that Peter did some tall thinking along these lines, and because Peter was the kind of person that he was, he may have been very well impressed by his own credentials, real or otherwise. And so you could take the list - - this was the kind of thing that was going on in their own minds. Jesus Christ, you may rest assured, was perfectly aware of this.

Now while they were pre-occupied . . .

> ...I should also tell you that ordinarily there was something now that should have been done that wasn't done. If you've lived in the Middle East, if you've traveled there, if you know anything about Oriental customs, you know that there is always a person assigned, a servant, who would wash the feet of the guests -- that was traditional. It was one way by which you could be relaxed when you sat down in the company of your host.....

....well, going back again, I presume that maybe Jesus had suggested to the host that there be just a limited number of people around and even indicated maybe that a servant wasn't necessary. But at any rate, the eye of Jesus went over to that corner of the room where there was a pitcher and a basin and a towel.

Now all the rest of the disciples, you may believe this, new very well that this was the kind of thing that ought to be done. But sensing that it wasn't being done, none of them volunteered to do it. You can understand why - - when each in his own way had some grandiose notion as to his position in life, and if he wanted to have some measure of preferment, he wasn't going to stoop to the level of a servant. You know who did. Jesus did.

Now in order to better appreciate that, hear me out on this. It takes a while for people to recognize what a person really is. Sometimes our real nature comes out immediately, and even if it does, it's only later on that people recognize us for what we actually are. I'm simply suggesting to you that I don't think that all of the disciples were perfectly aware of exactly who Jesus Christ was, that is as Scriptures later record it -- that "in Him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell . . " - - it was only in the post-Resurrection period that they could honestly believe and say to himself, that He was God in human form.

Now I have a feeling that Jesus Christ may have said to Himself that night, if He were as human as we are -- "It's high time that people know who I am.".....I think if Jesus Christ had been as human as we are, he would have pulled rank, and He would have said, "I've had enough of this!---you know exactly as an outfit that you're side-stepping something here that needs attention. Because I am who I am, I want my feet washed right now! -- Get with it!" .....He didn't talk like that. It is not the nature of love to demand. And even God, because He is God, is willing to humble Himself and take on the form of the servant. Remember how the Scripture puts it - - "Jesus Christ having come from God, and knowing that He would go to God". . . took a towel, and washed the disciples' feet.

So I suggest to you that when you think in terms of a symbol for the Christian faith, give a high and holy regard to a towel, the symbol of humility and the symbol of service.

It's not easy for us to remember it. There was a cartoon once of a man in a barber chair, a man of some affluence....there was a bib around the man's neck....the barber was busy at work with his tonsorial skill....his hand came out like that and the manicurist was doing her job.....and at his

feet sat the bootblack, shining his shoes. The caption for the cartoon:

MAKING IT BIG

....as though one arrives in life, you see, when things can be done for him.....that no man has really begun to live until he can command service.

This is absolutely contrary to the basic concept of the Christian religion. He who is no less than God humbled Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant - - He who had so great power never abused it, never paraded it, never misused it. Today's issue of PARADE has an article by Lloyd Shearer. It deals with General Haig. The reference, as you might know, in that article primarily deals with a former President of the United States. The author refers to the former President in these words:

> - - "He coveted power. He relished it. He was obsessed with it -- he used it, he abused it. He thrived on it, hating passionately to relinquish a scintilla. His behavior in many circumstances was despotic and imperialistic . . . "

...sad things to say about any man. Sadder still when it has to be said about a person who reaches a pinnacle of success.

And for some of us who have viewed Theodore White's television production of "The Making of The President" last night, we could hardly believe what we were seeing all over again, that the man who had received the greatest mandate from the American people should go from office the way he did.....and that people should write the kind of thing that I've just read for you! Whether you believe this to be true about that man or not is beside the point for the moment, but it's been said of others - - the abuse of power, the misuse of it.

Every single one of us has some kind of power, power to use over ourselves, power to use over those who are near to us - - every single one of us has some measure. Jesus Christ sets before us the example of using that power

to the good of other people. I'm convinced that as we live and work with other people, that as we see certain isolated incidents, we can read into that incident itself the total concept of that person and his life. Here in that moment in the upper room when Jesus Christ reached for a pitcher and water, a basin and a towel, He opened their eyes to the kind of person He always was - - - meeting the needs of other people.

Let's give ourselves some measure of credit. We're nobly intentioned. We'd like to do something wonderful and grand and glorious -- honestly we would! And then we belittle ourselves and say, "It's not in the books for me to go to a place like Africa -- halfway around the world -- to meet some pressing need - - ".....and then to think that your life is of little value. For shame upon you, my friend! Wherever God has put you, ask Him to open your eyes and see if in some corner close by there isn't a basin, and a pitcher.....and a towel.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost June 15, 1975

"ABOUT THE BIBLE"
(John 20:31)

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Three of the most pleasant years of my life were spent in Gettysburg. These were the years when I was a student in our theological seminary there. Most of our time, as you might presume, was spent on the Hill, about a mile from the center of the town. We were isolated, but that didn't worry us overmuch presumably, we were serious-minded, and having reached the graduate school level, it was small wonder that to all intents and purposes we were preoccupied with our studies. But occasionally we did take a sortie into town, perhaps to indulge ourselves in a coke or a hard pretzel - - we couldn't afford much beyond that.

And as we walked into town....I can remember it as though it were last night....down there not too far away from the center of town on the left-hand side of the street, there was that certain house where invariably, so it seemed to me as we passed, there was always a man seated near behind the window. He was immobilized. The information that we had received, and partially so, was that he had suffered a paralysis of sorts. And I presume his members of his family were thoughtful enough to put him there in a chair so that he could see the passing world on the outside, and draw some measure of stimulation from it.

Because we had this partial information, and because we recognized his affliction, we only cast a glance in his direction. We looked at him hurriedly, simply getting a glimpse, and then we'd go on. But like as not, whenever we

passed that house, there was the man in the window.

If you were to ask me now to describe his facial features, I couldn't do it. I cannot describe for you the color of his eyes nor of his hair. But I can tell you that had we passed that window and he wouldn't have been there, we might have been shaken up a bit. We were conscious of the fact that there was the man in the window.

Now there's a second thing that comes to my mind quickly as I recall those years in Gettysburg. Down on the other side of the street we passed by what was then known as Christ Church, still known as Christ Church but also affectionately referred to as the College Church in Gettysburg. A series of steps led to the main entrance, and there not far from the first or second step there was a memorial marker. Now you know very well that Gettysburg is studded with monuments, and Christ Church is no exception. This memorial marker is in the form of a pedestal, I presume maybe four feet high, and on top of it is the replica of a Bible. If I have my facts correct, this is a memorial to a preacher, a Lutheran pastor, who died during the Civil War, the war between the States.

Now you are thinking to yourself, as well you should, what's so relevant about these two illustrations this morning, Pastor? What do you have in mind? Why do you feel so constrained to bring them to our attention?

You see, I'm fully aware of the fact that this sermon today bears the title: "ABOUT THE BIBLE." And the sermon has a text, as well it should, the closing verse of the fourth Gospel - - the 31st verse of the 20th chapter of John. This is the way it reads:

> "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life through his name . . . "

Now recognize this, will you, that most people who write a book may prepare an introductory chapter or a preface, which is included at the beginning, so that the author wants to know that anyone who picks up his book will have the benefit of what he had in mind as he wrote that book, and that as they read it from page to page they will not fail to catch the meaning which lies inherent in every sentence. Not so John. For whatever reason that seemed important to him, when he wrote the fourth Gospel he waited until he had written all 20 chapters, and then, as though he were putting his pen aside, he reached for it again, and then wrote these words:

> ..."This is why these things have been written. Now if you don't catch the point, I suppose he's saying to us, "Go back and start all over again, and keep reading until you can clearly understand why I went to all the trouble to write what I have written. And if you don't see it this way, you've missed what I had in mind . . . "

Meanwhile back in Gettysburg . . . there is relevance, my friend, because as I continue to reflect upon that man with the face in the window, I think that's the way it is with a lot of people with regard to the Scriptures. They look at the Scriptures at a glance - - they only get a casual glimpse of the Scriptures. They're conscious of the fact that the Scriptures are there, and they might be somewhat shook-up if when they walked into the room they discover that the Bible had disappeared.....just as we might be troubled if one day we walked down and the man in the window wouldn't have been there.

There are people like that as far as the Bible is concerned. They know it only by a glance, they know it only as they've taken an occasional

glimpse - - just as I could not describe for you the facial features of the man, just as I could not describe for you the color of his hair or the color of his eyes, so there are people who when they think of the Scriptures cannot deal with the details, cannot give you the specifics. Alas for us, little would we realize that we leveled off so easily on so little that we knew about that man in the window. It never concerned us at the time how much more we might have learned if we had taken the trouble to find out.

Now I say to myself at this distance, three-and-a-half decades later --

> ...he might have been a retired army general -- an old soldier, who at some time in life had received this affliction, but he said, "Take me back to Gettysburg -- let me live out the rest of my life there . . "
>
> ...he might have been a college professor -- Gettysburg is a college town -- he might have been so stricken that he said, "If I can't be of any use to anybody, at least let me live in the town that means so much to me . . . "
>
> ...he may have been a writer....he may have been an inventor ....he may have been a man of God! -- a minister of the Gospel! We never took the trouble to find out. We simply settled for the fact that he was the face in the window, the man in the chair.

....<u>how our lives might have been enriched</u>, I suggest to you now, if we would have taken the trouble to find out, what we might have learned from him.

So I say to you, there are people like that regarding the Scriptures. They level so easily for the little that they know about it, and become content, failing to realize how much more they could know.

Now as far as the marker to that preacher who died in the War Between the States, I'm suggesting to you that that's the way it is, too, with some

people with the Bible - - - they put the Bible on a pedestal, they revere it, they respect it, they give it a holy place! There are some folks I know who would never think of putting anything on top of the Bible, they give it such exaltation -- it's in a class all by itself. But sadly enough, for some people, like that bronze replica of the Bible on that pedestal in Gettysburg, where the page is never turned, it remains the same -- so it is with some people with their Bibles. The page is never turned.

Didn't I tell you about my friend who came from the Middle East to enroll as a student in Gettysburg in the years that I was there -- his brand new introduction to the West. He had a photographic mind. He was an astute observer of the human scene. And he told me once when he went in to visit a student in his room, he was much pleased when he discovered over there on the stand two candles...between the two candles a cross, and in front of the cross, a Bible. And the man from the Middle East was impressed and said to himself, 'Here is a man of pious devotion, here is a man who must be guiding his life by the teachings from the Good Book.'

> ....a month later he had occasion to go back to visit the student -- remember I told you he was the man with the photographic mind -- the candles were there....the cross was there....so was the Bible -- open to the very same page!

....there are people like that regarding the Scriptures. And all the while the words of John ought to be searing our conscience: "These are written for a purpose."

According to good Lutheran tradition, it's the Bible that leads us to Jesus Christ. And until Jesus Christ comes into clear and sharp focus, until you see Him as something more than teacher, something more than just a good man, something more than just another prophet, something more than just an

exemplar of our behavior.....John says you really haven't read this book. You really haven't taken a good look at what I have been trying to say to you - - "These things are written that you might believe that Jesus Christ is Lord, and in believing it you might have life . . " - - until you know Him so well that His life becomes one in your life and His spirit becomes your spirit.

We have our moments when we think of days gone by. By this time you know full well that I grew up in a small town, and life was less complicated. My home-town Pastor was the kind of a pastor who had a minimum of administration in his parish, which meant that very easily for any given number of afternoons in the week he'd go walking down the street, stopping at this house and stopping at that house, just making a call....pretty much in the same fashion as a Prudential Insurance agent with that debit book under his arm, thick as it was, with all those nickel and dime and quarter accounts a week, you know. Invariably there would be somebody at home. It was not a very common thing for women to work in those days . . .

> ...I remember my home-town Pastor telling me about the day he made the call, knocked on the door, and a bright-eyed five-year-old, I think it was, answered the door -- cute as all get-out, you know -- "Come on in, Reverend" -- (they didn't use the word 'Pastor' in those days as we now use it) -- "My Mommie, she's busy in the kitchen." It was strawberry preserve time, she had her work cut out for her for the moment. The preacher was an interruption.....the little boy kept him occupied until Mommie came from the kitchen, talked a blue streak.....
> ....and then he said, "Over there is our Bible. I can tell you everything that's in it!"....and before the preacher could say, 'Isn't that fine!' - - the little boy said, "There's a

four-leaf clover . . . . . "

There's so much more in the Bible than that, you know. That's why John shook his head, I presume, as he reached for his pen again and said, "For God's sake, don't let them miss the point! It's the Bible that leads us to Jesus Christ." Keep reading! and reading! and reading, and reading, until He comes into clear and sharp focus. This Book is the Book of Life! It's meant to become alive in your heart.

> .....And that's why I can understand why that preacher in New York City shook up his congregation when the time came to lay the cornerstone for the addition of the building that he absolutely refused to allow them to put a Bible in the cornerstone as we are wont to do. For, said he, the Bible was never meant to be encased in stone. It's meant to be read, and to be studied. Its truth is meant to be fashioned from our lips and lived out from our hearts!

...now you think about that for a little while . . . .

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
St. Peter and St. Paul, Apostles June 29, 1975

"WHOSE WE ARE"
(I John 3:2)

CONTINUE to quiet our minds and hush our hearts, O God, that we should be made sensitive to the interpretation of Thy Word. In the name of Jesus Christ, who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

Clive Barnes, the drama critic of the NEW YORK TIMES, has given an excellent appraisal of George C. Scott's portrayal of Willie Loman in the revised production of "The Death of a Salesman." Currently it's being performed in the Circle In The Square Theatre in Manhattan.

You may remember Arthur Miller's work that was dramatized shortly after World War II, a deliberate attempt on the part of the playwright to get people in our society to pay attention to the likes of Willie Loman. In fact, if I remember it correctly, that's one of those telling lines in the play. His sons have become impatient with him. They've lost respect for their own father. They take their mother to task because she is as compassionate and as considerate as she is. And then she replies by saying, "But somebody has to pay attention to his kind."

Willie Loman at 63, you see, is a burned-out salesman, and the only thing he has of value now, as his life comes to an end, is a very modest life insurance policy. He wrote for himself, unwittingly I presume, his epitaph, when, according to one of the lines in the pay he says, "I feel rather temporary about myself." Another line in the play as I remember it: his family dutifully gather around the grave where he's buried. As they are about to go away, one of the sons says something to this effect: "What a pity - - he never really knew who he was!"

Now all of this has triggered thoughts in my mind that constrain me to preach to you the sermon that I'm about to share. For it seems to me in recent time that I've met many more than I'd like to admit who are like Willie Loman,

who never really find out who they are. In the psychologist's jargon, we have any number of people on our hands who are dealing with an 'identity crisis.'

Could that be true for you? Do you really know who you are? I suggest to you that not until you know who you are can you do what you're meant to do and can you move in the direction in which you're meant to move. Not until a man knows who he is can he really begin to live life meaningfully.

It's hard for me to understand, of course it is - - would you believe me if I were to tell you I don't know that I ever had an identity crisis in my life. I was fortunate enough to be part of a family of six kids, fortunate enough to have a set of parents who loved me, as they loved the others, and who provided for us as they provided for the others — who saw us growing up, getting married, and providing them with grandchildren . . . and to have an extended interest in us even to the very day that they died.

I never had an identity crisis. To begin with, I knew that I belonged to someone, and I belonged to a particular group. But then as I grew and developed I recognized the place of the church in my life — the pastor who baptized me was the pastor who confirmed me, was the pastor who placed hands in blessing upon my head when I was ordained....was the man who wrote me a very precious letter as I began my ministry. As the years continued to grow and develop, I realized that I was part of the greater family known as the Family of God. I belonged, and because I belonged I was attached. And in this relationship I had a measure of identity that has held me in good stead.

It's hard for me to understand how some people can have an identity crisis, and I hope you'll be patient with me if you're struggling with one right now, because I do want to understand. It's hard for me to understand

for this reason: an individual psychologist has said that most of us in our waking moments spend 90% of our time thinking of ourselves!-- if not directly, then about the things related to us....thinking about our health, our home, our family, our job, our car, our past, our present, our future, our neighbors, our friends, our children.....always thinking about things related specifically to us. And if we should spend so much time thinking about ourselves, then doesn't it stand to reason that it ought not be very long until there looms upon the horizon some clear and sharp focus of what we are, and who we are?

But then, my friends, the psychologists tell me that we differ from hour to hour. I may not be the same person this afternoon at four o'clock as I am right now standing in this pulpit - - basically the same, perhaps, but other traits and characteristics may appear that don't appear now...

> ...or a man may change from person to person. Some of you have a way of bringing out the better side of me. Some of you have a way of appealing to the base side of my nature....and I may change from person to person as I may change from hour to hour, or as I may change from situation and predicament from situation to predicament.....

Maybe I can understand why some people have some trouble trying to find out just who the real You happens to be. My friend Charlie Bettis, a member of this parish, sent me within the week a clipping authored by Robert D. Weber. It bears the title, significantly enough: "The Many I Am." He's dealing with the whole matter of self-concept which has dominated much that's been discussed and written by psychologists galore. He quotes a poem written several hundred years ago by an unknown author. It's titled: "Four Men" -- really he's only talking about one . . .

"It chanced upon a winter's night
Safe sheltered from the weather,
The board was spread for only one,
Yet four men dined together.
There sat the man I meant to be,
In glory, spurred and booted.
And close beside him, to the right,
The man I am reputed.
The man I think myself to be
His seat was occupying.
Hard by the man I really am,
Who to hold his own way trying.
And all beneath one roof we met,
Yet none called his fellow brother.
No sign of recognition passed - -
They knew not one another."

Weber goes on to say that while the poet talked about four men, within one man, he says, maybe we might say that in this critical concept of self there may be seven of us existing within one person. So he puts it this way:

There is the ME I <u>think</u> I am

There is the ME I <u>wish</u> I were

There is the ME I <u>really</u> am

There is the ME I <u>try to project</u>

There is the ME others <u>perceive</u>

There is the ME I <u>used</u> to be

There is the ME <u>others try to make me</u>

Well, frankly, I'm not going to let myself get hung up by this kind of reasoning. I'm going to suggest now that you take very seriously the passage of Scripture that is uppermost in my mind at this particular moment. It remains in my mind at this moment because it's been haunting me all week -- in fact we dealt with it in depth with two different groups on Wednesday of this past week. The passage of Scripture is written in the first Epistle of John, the 3rd chapter, the 2nd verse, and this wonderful man of God puts it down this way: "<u>We are the children of God</u>" - - that's what he sayd. And I presume he must have sounded a Te Deum in his soul when it dawned on him

that there wasn't anything temporary about him when he thought about himself, but he was very happy to introduce the eternal dimension -- he was identified with God.

With two different groups this past week we had an interesting exercise. Each person was given three pieces of scrap paper because he would have to deal with three different questions. And each piece of scrap paper would be used to answer one of the questions.

-- The first question was: Write down in your own words
and for your own satisfaction -- you don't
share this with anybody else --
Just what you think other people think of you

Now some of us do have some idea of what some other people think of us. That's why some of us find it hard to sleep at night, because we refuse to believe that we could be as bad as all that. Or as one person said on Wednesday night, she thoroughly enjoys being well-thought-of. We're intuitive enough to have some idea of what other people think of us, and it does influence us in our thinking about ourselves.

-- The second question was:

What do you really think about yourself?
Your appraisal?

I had a chap tell me last Sunday night after Vespers that part of his problem in life is that he's wrestling with low self-esteem. That's a very painful thing, to not have a very high opinion of yourself. I think sometimes we're crippled by one of two things - - either too high an opinion of ourselves, or too low an opinion of ourselves.

-- But the third question was the most important:

What do you think God thinks about you?
How do you stack up in His eyes?

That's exactly what John was talking about, and he said, "We're the children of God." - - we are the sons and daughters of a Heavenly Father. Now if you have an identity crisis, it ought to be resolved, my friend. If I were not a Christian, if I were not related to the Christian church for any other reason than this, I draw a great measure of satisfaction in the realization that the Christian church keeps hammering away at the truth that we are the children of God, and that Jesus Christ came into the world to prove to us how much the Heavenly Father loves us and is concerned for us - - that we were meant to live in this world as children of the Heavenly Father....that we were not meant to act like animals.....that we were not meant to simply live out our existence horizontally, but rather that we were to give constant recognition to the vertical dimension in the relationship that we have with God.

Alvin Rogness, bless his soul, has done an excellent thing in a little book that he wrote a few years back, in which he pictures for us God saying to each one of us, "I'm going to let you live on my island called Earth for a little while. But I want you to know who you are. You're simply someone who is living there for a little while. Your real home is Heaven. But while you're on Earth, live like my son, live like my daughter — live like My child ....reflect a bit of Heaven. Deal with people on the basis of love and truth and justice. Don't allow yourself to adapt to the ways of the world, because I'm sorry to tell you - - " Alvin Rogness has God saying to us - - "Some of your brothers have forgotten who they are. But don't you forget! And then some day when it's all over, I'll call you back home to where you belong. But in the meantime, live like my children."

I am pleased that the Lutheran Church is discovering all over again the meaning of baptism, for in baptism, according to the Lutheran theology, the

original sin is cancelled out. But for those who can't appreciate that theology, settle for this, will you: in baptism the sign and seal of God's favor is stamped upon us - - we're made one within the family. We belong. And that means identification.

Winifred and I used to go over to Princeton some of the summers to attend a conference there on the grounds of the theological seminary. We have precious memories of being under those great elm trees when Harris Franklin Kirk, then the beloved pastor of Franklin Street Presbyterian Church, would 'hold court' as we used to say. He'd talk to us out of his life and of his experience. With tremendous satisfaction in his heart he told us about the days when he grew up in the deep south.....

> ....and he had an old colored mammy who put him into bed at night....and as she'd tuck him into bed she'd say, "Harris, I've got to be good to you — you're God's child."

.....if only we could be good to one another, remembering to whom they belong . . .

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Seventh Sunday After Pentecost July 6, 1975

"EXCEPT THE LORD BUILD - - "

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

For what it may be worth to you, if anything at all, you may be pleased to learn that I spent a great portion of Independence Day -- that's the proper title, isn't it, for the 4th of July? -- by reading the Declaration of Independence in its entirety. I'm glad that I did, and now I regret that I hadn't planned it far enough in advance in my own schedule so that I could have invited some of you to stop by the church, and if it was convenient for you, together we could have read it, and then shared some reflections. But your not being there, I continued to reflect upon it myself. And maybe, if you don't mind, I'd like to tell you a little bit about some of the things that occurred to me when I read that document as though I had not read it before.

And as I read it anew, I also paid attention to those who had signed the document. And then I reflected - - - John Hancock -- your name stands out above all the others. Why so?

Well, there are two reasons. One, he was the only one to sign the document the day it was approved, the order having been made that they should wait until it was engrossed on parchment, until all the other 55 would sign. So I suppose having the space all to himself, he went to town.

But there's another reason for it. John Hancock, so we're told, signed as boldly as he did because, he said, I want the King of England to see my name even without having to reach for his glasses to read it!

That also caused me to reflect upon the other signatures. Some I could hardly decipher at all, they were written so small. And then I asked myself, were there those who signed reluctantly? What were the deep thoughts that went through their minds as they reached for their pens, or as they put the goose quill aside? I know very well from reading a bit of history that many of them signed with doubt and with fear, against the background of this document as we see it today, one must never forget there was doubt, and there was fear.

On July 3, 1776, John Adams wrote to his wife and told her that he realized full well the terrible price they would have to pay for their independence. The writer on the Editorial Page of the NEW YORK TIMES for July 4, 1975, spoke wisely and well when he said, "The signing of that Thomas Jefferson document was <u>not</u> to be considered a capstone to a victorious rebellion, for as they met together and deliberated, they were not always of the same mind! There was doubt. There was hesitation." They were not forgetting, you see, that Washington's forces were outnumbered four-to-one. And they also had to deal realistically with the fact that when it came to sign, that the New York delegation could not affix their signature. They had to wait until they got instructions from back home. And New York state wasn't sure where it stood at that time! And the signatures of the New York delegation were the last to be affixed, and that some time later after the others had signed. They had an agreement among themselves that no one would sign from any delegation unless there was a majority vote within the delegation...

> ...Delaware was evenly divided, so when the vote was cast on July 3, Delaware was disqualified . . .

....and should I tell you this — Pennsylvania, of all states, together with South Carolina, voted against it! Hear me and hear me well - - you may have a John Hancock who says, "When I sign I'll sign so that the King of England can read it without reaching for his glasses" - - you may have a Charles Carroll, who when he signed said, " . . of Carrollton" . . . so if the King of England were to search him out he'd know exactly where to find him . . .

...but for some of the others I surmise there were deep thoughts, and maybe some who signed with hesitation when they remembered the doubts and the fears that lay hold upon them.

Bruce Caton is absolutely right when he wrote, "The central reality in this great act that brought a nation to its birth was the living, aspiring, struggling people." It was a struggle, furthermore, that was fought out by the people who were very much like ourselves today, which is to say that they were very often confused -- usually divided in sentiment, and now and then rather badly discouraged about the possible outcome of the tremendous task that they had undertaken.

> ...remember it and remember it well -- classified as one of the finest things ever to come from the mind of man -- those who signed it must have signed it with deep and earnest thought, against a background of fear and doubt.

But the document was signed! And a nation was born! And for 199 years the republic has survived.

Why do I come to you with so great enthusiasm this day to this place which stands for a loyalty above kings, and emperors, and governors, and presidents?

Know this and know it very well, my friend, that every time I come to this place I recognize that my loyalty is above all else to Him who is King above all kings and Lord above all lords. I do not come this morning to this place as a partisan patriot, as one who is a national, with blinders upon his eyes as far as the other nations of the world are concerned. But I do come as one who recognizes that when this nation was born, it was given a spiritual foundation, and to this I rise to speak and to pay tribute.

How did it happen? Well, let me tell you.

There happened to be the time when the signatures were about to be affixed a day or so ahead of time -- some lack of unity, not particularly pronounced discord, but some of you who have attended meetings will know what I mean when I say it just hadn't begun to mesh. Something seemed lacking. And then they looked to the elder statesman who happened to be present, a man in his 70's, who up to this point hadn't said much of anything at all. And they asked Benjamin Franklin to speak.

At first he refused to say anything. But finally he arose to his feet and spoke a few words based on Psalm 127, and it's the first verse of that Psalm which serves as the basis for today's sermon:

> "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it . . . "

Now keep that in the recesses of your mind as you think of what's already been said and of what's yet to follow.

> .....so he rose to his feet and spoke a few words based on Psalm 127.....and from that brief talk, I am happy to tell you, came the spiritual foundation of the United States of America and the Declaration of Independence.....

Benjamin Franklin said, "I have lived a long time. The longer I live the more convincing proof I see of this truth that God governs the affairs of men,

and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His will, is it possible for an empire to rise without His notice? We have been assured of the sacred writing that except the Lord build a house, they labor in vain who build it. I firmly believe this. And I also believe that without His concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."

> ...now what do you suppose he suggested after he had spoken? He suggested that they pray. Which they did. And that's the way it was, July 4, seventeen hundred seventy-six.

I come to this sacred desk to remind you that ours is a nation with a spiritual foundation. We refer to it, that document, as the Declaration of Independence. In the little while that we spend here, would you believe me when I say that we can refer to it also as the "Declaration of Dependence." You will find such phraseology as this in this document:

> "We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in general congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions . . . "

...are you aware that that was put in the Declaration of Independence? How often do you remind yourself as a citizen of this republic that the founding fathers, before they went anywhere at all with their Declaration, wanted it to be understood that they recognized their obligation to have the rightness of their United States approved by the Supreme Being.

There's further cause for reflection when I remind you that as the document is concluded, it is concluded with these words:

> " . . . and for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our

lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor . . . "

They wouldn't lay anything of themselves on the line unless they had first said that they could be given the assurance of divine aid. Remind yourself, and remind yourself again and ever so often, that ours is a nation with a spiritual foundation, a nation under God. And if you were to ask me why it has survived for 199 years, I would have to say to you with all the strength that I could command: simply because of the way it was begun.

Now there's further cause for reflection, my friend. I suppose I'll have to preface what I'm going to say to you by saying this, that of all the sins I hope my Lord will never find me guilty, one of them is the sin of cynicism. You remember that I made this admission to you. What I'm wondering - - if today we were called upon to draft a similar statement, would we just as earnestly as they introduct the divine perspective, the eternal dimension? Would we today, as unashamedly as they, say, "Except the Lord build a house, they labor in vain tho build it . . " ? Would we, as they, say, we must rely upon divine protection? I have to say to you quite honestly that I cannot answer enthusiastically in the affirmative. I brand myself a brooding optimist. I cannot take the name of Christ and not be an optimist. But when I put my finger upon the pulsebeat of our nation again and ever so often, I have to look long and hard for something more than mere respect for the Almighty.

I cherish for our day - - this was it, the President of Harvard of Yale, who twenty years ago, so I am told, said that maybe the test of a truly educated man is his capability to mention the name of God without hesitation and without embarrassment.

I know not what the future has in store for us as a nation except to say this to you, that what is true for a nation is the same as what's true for an individual. When a man forgets God, he's in for deep trouble. I hope

the day will never come when America will be so smart for its own good that she can fail to heed the admonition of an elder statesman, who could say calmly and with so great confidence: "I believe that God governs in the affairs of men." Now you think about that.

We're not too far away from July 4, 1976. We've got a year to continue to think about it. Up in Wilmington, Delaware, by the way, they have a statue to Caesar Rodney. He was the chap from Delaware, you know, among others, who went to Philadelphia to help sign, when the time came that they could, the Declaration of Independence. My friend tells me as Caesar Rodney is astride his horse, they have him heading toward Philadelphia, so that at any time when anybody comes and looks at that statue, they'll remember that he was there.

We do well to face toward Philadelphia, between now and July 14, 1976 -- to think of what happened in that State House. But to remember above all else that the people who were there, as we face Philadelphia, were people who cast their faces Heavenward....

...something worth remembering, honestly . . . .

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Eighth Sunday After Pentecost July 13, 1975

"TO CHANGE A WORLD"

II Corinthians 5:17

WE HAVE SO little time, O God, to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of Your Word. That we should make the most of our time together now, we ask the help of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let me tell you at once about a Irishman named Pat. You've heard many stories about him. Undoubtedly you've heard this one, too. It concerns Pat and his pig.....he was astounded that the pig's habits were as filthy as they were. And then he muses to himself, and said, "Small wonder! Look at his surroundings! I'll take him out of his pigsty, I'll improve his situation."

So according to the story -- you remember it, don't you -- Pat put his pig in a palace. You know what happened, don't you? It wasn't long until the palace became a pigsty. For Pat reminds us that a pig is a pig, is a pig, is a pig. Once a pig, always a pig.

There are any number of people I know who don't forget that. And they transfer that to their concept of people. And if I've heard it said once I've heard it said many times -- you can't change them, what they are, they are!

I come to this sacred desk this morning to remind you that this is contrary to a basic Christian truth. Let me read for you the text that triggers all of these thoughts in my mind, and hopefully you may listen to them with some degree of profit. The text, the 17th verse of the 5th chapter of that Second Letter that Paul wrote to some Christians who lived in Corinth. This is the way he put it:

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation."

One translation has it:

"If any man be in Christ, he becomes a new creature."

My favorite translation is that of J. B. Phillips, who puts it quite dynamically:

"If any man be in Christ, he becomes a brand new person altogether."

...as much as to say, a change sets in -- it's visible -- it's pronounced -- it's readily evidenced.

Now sometimes when I preach a sermon I try to visualize myself sitting with a small group of people, and because we do sit down as a small group of people it's very easy to respond and to react. Some of us have been doing this now for a number of Wednesday nights in Bieber Hall. It's been a good experience. And if I were to find myself in that kind of a situation now, I can well imagine how some of you could very honestly say, "Even though you carry the name of Christian, I don't believe it!"

> .....again I'll say, if I've heard some of you say it, I've heard a hundred people beside you say it: "You can't change human nature - - what they are, they are."

When I began my ministry, characterized by the youthful enthusiasm of a man fresh from seminary, and also convinced, as I hope I am still convinced, that any man anywhere can be changed, that no man is to be condemned as lost forever. And because I understood the Christian Gospel in this way, I was appalled by a colleague in the ministry who had had some years over me, who when I named a particular family that was on my prospective list, that was on his prospective list longer than he was on mine, he simply said to me, "You're wasting your time! They'll never change. In fact, I think I'll

take them off my prospect list completely" I could hardly believe a minister of the Gospel saying that, because if I understand the Christian Gospel at all, there's always the possibility that a person can change.

Frequently when you read Scripture, let me suggest to you that some of the passages are autobiographical -- deliberately so. So much so that the person who speaks the words that we now read is saying to us, "And I'm putting my own life on the line - - you can believe what I am saying because take me primarily as an example . . . " The Apostle Paul knew whereof he spoke. He was Exhibit A. There was a line that could be drawn in his life before Christ, and after Christ, and anyone who is a student of the Scriptures knows exactly the kind of person the Apostle Paul was before his life was changed dynamically by Jesus Christ. So Paul is saying to us, "Take my word for it. If any man be in Christ, he does become a new person."

Examine the text carefully: "If any man . . . " It implies, of course, that until Christ takes over a man's life, a man is denied a change, a transformation, that otherwise he might note -- any man. It also implies that no man is so good but what this couldn't happen to him . . . and no man is so low nor lost but what there isn't hope. I can't tamper with that Scripture, my friend. That's exactly what it says. This is possible for any man.

Unfortunately for some of us, we have had a kind of relationship with them, we've had a rather unfortunate experience, and so in our impatience, or in our lack of faith in the power of God's grace, we mark them off, and rule out the possibility of any kind of change. Or, I'm sorry to have to tell you this, that there are some of us who know a measure of status when we can keep them beneath us, when we can imprison them and deny them the possibility of change, because what's going to happen to our measure of pride, you see, when they become as good as we? - - what's going to happen to us

when they can talk about the same transforming quality that they now say has come to them? - - what advantage do we have over them?

One of the dastardly things about life is the way we've locked some people in, the way we paint them into a corner, the way we freeze them into a mold . . . and say that's the way they are, that's the way they're going to remain.

"If any man be in Christ," says Paul, "he
becomes a brand new person altogether . . . "

....well, I'm going to surprise you a bit and respond to that, as though I were a member of the small group on the periphery, constrained to speak up to the man who is conducting the meeting. I'd say my response to that is Yes, and No.

First No. And by that I mean he has to go back to the same world. Just because a man becomes a Christian now doesn't mean that his problems are going to be any different. Just because a man becomes new in Christ doesn't mean that the neighborhood is going to change! He may still have that incompatible foreman with whom he has to work at the shop....he may still have that supervisor who irritates him.....he may still have to ride in the carpool with that other person who grates -- just the way that other person speaks! The situation may not change once a man's soul is possessed by Jesus Christ. The world in which he has to live and to move may be pretty much the same. In that sense, the answer is, there isn't much of a change.

But as far as the individual is concerned, and he is the one of whom we speak - - - enthusiastically Yes! - - - there is a change. The change is not made on the outside. The change is made because of what happens on the inside. The world may be the same, but he looks at it differently.

You've heard me use the parallel frequently between religion and love. I never cease to marvel at what happens when a person falls in love (we have no other way of saying it, you see) - - what we're really saying is that when a person comes under the influence of another person who claims his heart, it happens.

> ....he isn't here this morning, so I'm going to take advantage of it. But I remember it as though it were yesterday, when he fell in love with his Ellen. He was still in high school. I can see him walking up the driveway at 9219 Manchester Road....there was a spring in his step that hadn't been there before....there was a gleam in his eye that wasn't noticeable earlier. That lane at 9219 Manchester Road was still the same lane as it had been for years, he had to come home to us who were the same people, and he had to go back to the same difficult assignments at Montgomery Blair. But something had happened to him. Something new had been introduced into his life. And he's never been the same since.

Anyone who's been by love possessed knows exactly whereof I speak.

I surprise people sometimes when they come to see me about being married, and when I take seriously the responsibility that rests upon me in the interview session. But I introduce to them, I learn that in some cases they just hadn't thought of it before in that manner . . and this is what I say to them: You're recognizing, aren't you, that from this moment on, that once you're married, whatever you do is done by way of reference and relationship to this person now who claims your heart! No decision of any value could ever be made without acknowledging this identification and this relationship with

this person -- honestly!

Now meanwhile, back to the text: "If any man be in Christ . . . " Well, that's rather hard for some of you to understand. You're not mystically-minded enough, honestly you aren't, I know you aren't. You're not the sons and daughters of the East that's characterized by mysticism. It's extremely difficult for you to think how you could be in Christ.

Well let's turn the text around a bit, then. Instead of saying, "If any man be in Christ he becomes a new person" - - let me put it for you this way: "When Christ is in you, you become a new person." When the lover knows that he's being loved, when the heart is claimed by somebody else, the transformation sets in. And I say this to you with all the strength that I can command - - when Christ comes into a man's heart, when Christ begins to rule at the center, a change sets in! Because then from that point on you begin to think in His terms, you begin to look at life through His eyes. His values become your values, and His moral framework of reference to which He always relates Himself is the reference to which you relate yourself ethically. Honestly I believe this.

I don't see how you can read the New Testament without being impressed how time and time again people's lives were changed. I am thinking of two as excellent examples.....

> - - there was a woman, we call her a woman of the street, of easy virtue. When Christ became the center of her life, she was transformed. He couldn't bring back her innocence, but He did give her a new direction toward which to move. It happened so magnificently that even when the end came she was numbered among the most faithful. And to this very day they name hospitals and colleges after the Magdalene . . .
>
> - - then there was that little bit of a Jew -- I delight in telling

> the story about Zacchaeus, who one day after an encounter with Jesus Christ said, "I know the kind of person that I have been, but now that I've met you it's going to be different!" . . and he ended up by saying, "If I've stolen from any man, I'm going to give him back four-fold — if I've gypped him twenty-five dollars, I'm going to see that he gets a hundred!"

Now what I haven't told you so far is this, and you're going to find this just as difficult to believe, unless you're under the influence of the Spirit, as what I said earlier: this change can take place in the here and now. It isn't something that you have to wait for thirty years from now to happen. A man can become a new person in Christ then and there. When Mary Magdalene, the prostitute, became a new woman, it happened there and then! When Zacchaeus came down from his tree and went to his house and set a spread for the Master, he didn't say, three weeks from now the change is going to set in - - - the change set in then and there. I believe this. I can bear testimony out of my own life. And if I were free to do it right now, I could name people who are now seated in the area where you may be seated who could rise up and say,"I know whereof you speak!"

Now, my friends, I have to tell you this as earnestly as I can. Every now and then we forget this in the Christian church. We think that just because people sign up as church members, that that's it. Just being a church member is no guarantee that a life is being changed by the influence of Jesus Christ. And yet at the same time I must also tell you that this is really what the Christian church is all about. The Christian church is the society of people whose lives are being changed by the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is what it's really all about.

I hear people say that what we could do is to change the system

...well, I know sometimes systems have to be changed, but

I don't get too excited about it . .

I know there are people who tell me, if only we could extend education -- enlighten their minds, we'd improve the world of which we are part, and I believe that to a degree

...but I don't put all my eggs in that basket . .

I know there are people who tell me, if only we could change their environment, and take them out of the slum and the ghetto

...and I'm not completely against that, don't misunderstand me.

But I'm constrained to share with you what Edwin Markham, the poet, said:

"Why build these cities glorious,
if man unbuilded goes?
In vain we build the work unless
the worker also grows . . "

I am old-fashioned to believe, honestly I am, that you change a world by changed people. And a long, long time ago there was a Carpenter's Son who proved the point. But some of us have forgotten it.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost July 20, 1975

"OUR AGONIZING GOD"
(Romans 8:26-28)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Tell me, when you think of God, just how do you think of Him? How near at hand is He? How vitally concerned is He in what you think, in what you do, in what you feel, and in the person that you've become? - - do you honestly believe that it makes any difference to Him at all?

Gilbert K. Chesterton once observed that if a man went looking for a place to stay, he'd feel far more secure, he believed, if instead of looking the landlady in the eye and asking, "How do you brew your coffee?.....how do you prepare your bacon?" - - - it would be far nearer the point if he would say, "Madam, tell me, what is your total view of the universe?" Because, you see, if one believes certain things about the hand that has created the world, or if one can go so far as to believe fervently in the fatherhood of God, you can tell something about that person's basic nature and character. So it's terribly important as to what you honestly believe about the nature and character of God, because that belief determines your nature and your character, and the way you think determines the way you behave.

Tell me, then, what do you really believe about God? How interested is He in you? How mindful is He of your plight and your condition?

Among some religious groups, when they think of God, they keep Him in the distance -- He's far removed -- they want a God who's perfect. They allow themselves to think that if He mingled too much with them, if He got too close to them, He'd be corrupted by the world. And they wouldn't want a God who smacked of imperfectability. How close is your God to you? How mindful is He of your plight? It's a good question.

Do you mind if I announce the title for today's sermon at this point? The title of today's sermon is "Our Agonizing God" and the text, from the Epistle for the day, from a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians who lived in the imperial city of Rome. Basically the Epistle constitutes two verses, the 26th and the 27th verses -- three in fact, the 28th as well, of that 8th chapter of Romans. For our purpose, a portion of the 26th will suffice:

> "But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words . . ."

The old translation had it this way:

> "The Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered . . . "

Now here are some of the thoughts that have been triggered by this text. But we'll have to back up a minute if you don't mind.

I went to see him some months ago. It was the post-operative period in the hospital. Surgery had been performed. He had nothing to do now but rest and let nature provide its healing touch. He was a bit restless. He'd read a bit, then he'd quit reading. Then he'd turn on the radio, then he'd turn it off. Then he'd listen to television for a while and watch it. The upshot was that in my conversation with him, I learned that he'd become conversant with practically all the newscasters of the different channels. But then he lamented, "All I can say, Pastor, is that the news is not good."

From my vantage-point, I suppose I could have replied to him, quite properly so, "So what else is new?" - - because that's your reaction and my response as well, isn't it? No matter what you've been listening to lately, no matter what newspapers or periodicals you put aside...The news is not good.--- the whole creation groans, it's that troubled. Name any area of the world --

Korea....Portugal....Argentina....India....Southeast Asia...the entire Middle East that moves from one crisis to another, if not day by day, then week by week.

It troubled me when I heard him say it — I didn't expect a man of the cloth to make a statement like this, I was so enthusiastic as I began my ministry, but shortly after World War II, Dr. Paul Empie, "Mr.-Lutheran-of-the-World" at that time, and I were talking. And he made this observation: "I never again expect to see in my lifetime, the world smack of anything that's near normal. I anticipate a world of continued disruption." His prediction has come true.

Now all of this leads me to ask you to go back and read sometime today, or before you go to bed tonight, the entire context in which today's Epistle lesson has been cast. For the Apostle Paul is talking about three different groaning situations.

— He makes reference to the fact that the whole creation groans - - trouble, trouble, trouble anywhere, everywhere. The Apostle Paul was talking like that almost two thousand years ago. And one might be able to say that the theme-song for humanity could be the old Negro lady's lament, "Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen." For it seems to be that the whole creation groans.....

....I know we sing a hymn, and there was a book entitled, "All Things Bright and Beautiful" - - which in some happy moment prompts us to reflect upon a world and say it's perfectly beautiful. But it isn't. It is a world that has such a thing as a tiger....a snake.....I'd be very happy if I could succeed in killing that snake that's startled me occasionally, within ten feet of our doorway in that little place in the country. Maybe it is harmless, and I believe it is. But nonetheless I haven't reached the point where I call it beautiful. Nor am I happy to be startled by it.

When I was in India I was impressed by the water buffalo. A man once observed it's the only animal in the world that's disease-resistant - - but he was wrong, as any veterinarian can tell you. There's no such thing as an animal that's invulnerable to disease. The whole creation runs the risk of groaning.

Then the Apostle Paul went on to a second situation, and he said not only the whole creation, but we ourselves groan. All of us are in some way troubled people, and far from satisfied from the situation we create for ourselves. Look what we have done with the world. Some of my younger friends tell me that that's one reason why they say we turn them off, because they seem to have hoped for far more from us than what we are able to deliver. Maybe in somber moments we have to realistically appraise the situation and admit that we really haven't done as well as we might have done.

I remember the student in college talking about that school of philosophy that believed that 'day by day in every way we're becoming better and better and better' . . . and all the while the theologians were shaking their heads and saying, it isn't true. We Lutherans, among perhaps a limited number of Christians in the world, still believe in the depravity of human nature, that man left to himself and to his own devices creates a hell. And that's another reason why every time we Lutherans come back to worship we begin at the same point. We did it today and we did last Sunday:

> ...."We sinners confess unto You that we are by
> nature sinful and unclean."

I can remember as a kid growing up, I got a prize for standing up on a platform and reciting the preamble to the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact. As a youngster I dreamed of a world of peace. But we had no peace, in my lifetime. I was exposed to World War I. Then came along World War II. Then Korea. Then Vietnam. And we're all living under the threat of a third world war.

A President of the United States has said that were there to be a nuclear explosion, 129 million people would die within ten minutes. We ourselves groan within us. We agonize.

We invented the airplane - - what grand and noble schemes we had. And then the satanic influence prevailed, and we've used it as an instrument of death and destruction and devastation. We had hoped it would be used for this kind of thing, transporting the surgeon to the site of the patient so that a life might be saved. But now we transport swindlers, smugglers. There is nothing that we have not used satanically.

So stained is man by original sin that we agonize because we know it is true - - -

> ...the wireless, or the radio — to communicate truth, to spread the word quickly from one nation to another, from one part of a nation to another. The satanic influence has used it as a propoganda device to tell lies.....
>
> ...no sooner did we have television but what we had high hopes it would bring culture within the reach of many people. And then what did we say: the monster in the living room.....

....almost anything, let me say it again, if not anything, that we've ever had we have been able to use satanically. And we agonize because we know it is true.

Now let me stop at this point and ask you a question that in all likelihood you haven't asked yourself for a long, long time, if ever at all: What do you dread most? What do you think could be the most awful thing that could ever happen to you?

I've had my moments when I've entertained that question . . .

.....I dread crippling arthritis. I've seen what it's done to people

.....I dread muscular dystrophy

.....I dread inoperable, incurable cancer. I know what it did to my mother

.....I dread the thought of blindness

What do you think could be the most awful thing that could happen to you? Having prestige taken away from you? Having people lose respect for you? You're waiting for me to come around to it — I dread the thought of losing someone I love, on whom I depend. I've seen what other people have had to endure when the angel with the white wings has hovered over a family circle and removed someone. It would be an awful thing. It is, as you can testify.

But I pass all of these by, would you believe me, as I now suggest to you that the most awful thing that could happen to me, as I see it, would be to have no one in whom to believe, and by that I mean not to be able to believe in God. I wouldn't want to face another hour if I couldn't believe in the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God to whom the Apostle Paul refers to now in the third groaning situation in this context, in which he says: "The Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings that lie too deep for words."

Come now, let me give you the thrust of this sermon immediately. We have a God who suffers with us. We have a God who cares for us. We have a God who is personally involved with us. We have a God who will not turn His back upon us and say, "Let them go to hell, they deserve it." Ours is the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world to suffer and die for us. What a tremendous concept that is, to know that God Himself agonizes when He thinks of us and our predicament. And herein lies our hope, for it would seem to me that any measure of improvement that

we've ever made we've made just because God would never allow us to remain in our misery.....because God says, "I take note of it and I am concerned, and let's together do something about it."

Some day I must preach to you a sermon on the other half to this text, in which it is put for us: "The Spirit himself makes intercession for us." You remember what we said on Ascension Day, what we said to ourselves of the truth that came to us anew, Where is Jesus Christ now? — He's sitting at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us.

Let me put it for you this way: when you and I agonize so much and the situation becomes so intolerable in this world of which we are a part, and we don't even know how to pray, the Apostle Paul says, "Even the Spirit begins to take over for us at that point and prays in our behalf, with words that are too deep even to be uttered."

...that's a hopeful sign.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Tenth Sunday After Pentecost July 27, 1975

"ACCORDING TO GOD'S PLAN"

Romans 8:14-39

O GOD, We make so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of Your Word. Now that we're about to do it, give us the blessing of Your Holy Spirit, that we may make the most of it. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

You didn't hear me say it, but I was saying it to myself, I should have done it, because that's precisely what I thought and what I felt. Because I looked at you when the Epistle lesson was being read. I saw hardly any sign of emotion at all. One of the truly great passages of Scripture, and one, I dare say, that has shaken a lot of people up, but I didn't see much sign of emotion on your faces.

And what I said to myself was that I should have stood beside the Lesson Reader and said, "Now hold on a minute. I'd better give these people a bit of warning, because in all likelihood if they're going to listen with any degree of sensitivity, they could be shaking their heads and saying to themselves, if not aloud, 'I don't believe it.'"

Now this is what you missed if you weren't paying attention when the Epistle was being read, and you know I'm saying this not because I'm chastizing you - - I'm saying it out of pure love. In the King James translation it read like this:

> "For we know that all things work together
> for good to them who love the Lord."

I've known people who when they've heard that have shaken their head and said, "I don't believe it - - anything that happens? -- good comes out of it?"

If you were the kind of person that some people happen to be, and you had a pencil in your hand and you read Scripture, there would be certain verses that you'd underline -- you'd believe them. Or you might even go so far, with the testimony of your own experience, to put a bold exclamation point which would be your Amen! -- I know this to be true....

> ....if you're also the kind of people who when he reads Scripture with his pen in hand would put a big question-mark after this verse, because you're not so sure that you believe it, and even if you would want to believe it, you're not so sure that life proves it to be true -- that all things work for good to those who love the Lord.....

You know some people who love the Lord far better than you do, and you know the hell they've had to face, and the misery that has come to them. And now we ask you to believe that that can work for good. Well maybe it will be helpful if you'd read the translation that J. B. Phillips gives us regarding this text. It speaks to my soul, I much prefer it:

> "Moreover we know that to those who love God . . "
>
> (you begin at that point)
>
> " . . to those who love God -- you're called according to his plan....."

...this is very important, you see, that you get it in its proper context....

> " . . everything that happens fits into a pattern for good."

Now you might be willing to give this more than a second glance when you read it according to J. B. Phillips.

When you talk first about the goodness of God and the love of God, when you recognize the fact that God has a plan, then you might be willing to admit that everything that happens fits into a pattern for good. But maybe not. And I'm going to suggest to you now two things as we wrestle with this

text.

The first one is that some people shy away from it because they can never get themselves to admit that there is a pattern that's going to prevail as far as their lives are concerned. Honestly now. Some folks' lives are a helter-skelter sort of thing. It isn't that they don't have noble intentions, it isn't that they don't dream fervently. It isn't that they lack ambition. But lo and behold, they take three steps in this direction, and within ten days they find themselves slipping backwards three yards! They plan something today, and they endeavor to accomplish it, but by the end of the week they're completely thrown for a loop - - the winds of life, the storms, assail them. And they're driven this way and that way. And they simply go on day by day just trying to keep their heads above water, and they just can't see that there's any pattern at all, or that there's any progress being made. This is why some people shy away from this text.

Well let's be patient with one another. Maybe God alone knows the pattern. Maybe God alone knows how ultimately all of these things will fit together, as a jigsaw puzzle is composed, and we have limited vision. Maybe we have to accept that.

But you see the problem is that some of us are so constituted that we're not about to take any step in any direction unless we know just where it's going to lead. We want the whole story now. And life doesn't always give us the whole story now.

After spending three-and-a-half decades in the ministry I've come to one conclusion - - I'll never allow myself to say I've seen everything. Almost every time I walk into a so-called 'confessional booth' with one of you, I brace myself to say it could be something that I have never heard before. Life can be like that. And because it can throw so many different angles,

and because we have an innate desire to see how it's all going to work out right now, we're thrown off-guard, and we're crippled, and we can't think rationally, because some of us are so constituted that we like to see all of the pieces put together now.....failing to realize sometimes that the specifics themselves are not the essential things, and that the primary thing is the direction in which we're about to move. Not how much progress one may make tomorrow morning by 10:00 o'clock, but sufficient in the eye of God could be just the direction in which one tends to move.

I satisfy myself on occasions when I can say to some of you, well if you can just be sure in your heart that you want to do the right thing, and if your heart is right, then I have reason to believe that in God's sight everything will come right.

If it's helpful to you, out of my own book perhaps you'd like to look at this page . . . some years back I had a crisis. I was Pastor of another church. Let me fill in the detail if you don't mind.....

> ....we had everything going for us. The past was secure and the future was bright. Honestly. And then that call from Frank Gunther — "Would you allow us to consider the possibility of your coming to Saint Luke, Silver Spring, Maryland?" .....I had never been here. I didn't know any of you. We had two sons to think about. We had our own families to think about. Well, I needn't tire you with all these details.....I was a small-town boy. To come to a metropolitan area, to adjust to suburban living?.....

I sought the advice of the then-Secretary of the Church, Dr. F. Eppling Reinartz, who simply said, "You pray. You read the Scriptures for what enlightenment may come to you. You seek out only a few trusted friends.

You don't scatter your shot, you don't expose your soul to everybody, but only a few whose judgment you respect, and you seek their counsel. Then you go off by yourself, and with what enlightenment you have, you decide. You act in faith and trust that the future will confirm that your decision was right."

Maybe that will be helpful to you, because you see, where God is concerned there's always the element of trust that needs to be exacted.

> "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord . . . "

-- they do fit into a pattern, but you have to be willing to trust Him to put the pieces together that you're willing to place into His hands!

Now there's another thing about this text that troubles people, I think -- not that they can't simply see the whole pattern at once, which is true. Very few can. I'd like to predict what the next chapter in my life is going to be, but I know that I can't do it! Sufficient for me to know the direction in which I ought to move. But the other thing about this text that bothers some people: the fact that there is such a thing as evil in the world.

Now if nothing but good happened to us, who in the world, then, wouldn't be willing to believe that all things work together for good! But can you and I honestly believe that evil in God's hand, once laid upon by the hand of God, can be fashioned for good? That's what throws us, you see, because we do happen to live in a world where the devil is still in business, and where evil is constantly raising its ugly head. So then, when the unfortunate and the ugly and the untoward happens to us, can we believe that these things can work for good?

Well, let me suggest this to you. The years have also taught me, and I hope I won't forget it, that it isn't so much what happens to us in life

that's important as it is what we do with what happens to us. It's how we handle the circumstances. You know what - - let's go back to the very beginning. I believe that God created the world -- "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . " The very first thing that you and I say about God is that He's creative.

Now you and I -- take heart, my friend -- you and I are made in the image of God. That means His likeness is stamped upon us, and we're meant to be creative, we're meant to be able to do something, to fashion something. I'm impressed sometimes how different people react to the same thing, which is simply to say, how they handle the same thing.....

...some people become wealthy, and their wealth destroys them. They don't know how to handle it....

...some people become wealthy and it becomes their opportunity to do good, unmeasured good, over and above what they have been able to do with the little that they had.....

...some people are confronted by criticism, and they'rs completely demoralized!

-- other people are stimulated by it, challenged, learn from it....

God intends us to be creative, to handle positively the untoward, the ugly, the unfortunate. This I most certainly believe.

When will it ever dawn on us that the symbol of the Christian faith is a cross? - - an empty cross. God did something creative with that dastardly action of the human spirit. It is possible. Who would want to live in a world where good did not prevail? That's how God got His name. God means good -- eternal -- everlasting -- without an ending.

I covet for you, as I covet for myself, a new appreciation for this tremendous text:

> "Moreover we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan . . ."
>
> (and that means you, and that means me)
>
> " . . that everything that happens can fit into a pattern for good."

If you find it hard to believe on the basis of your own experience, then believe it on the experience of other people who have found it to be true.

After the 8:30 service this morning a woman walked up to me out on the church lawn as we shared the refreshment period together, and she said, "Your text was the favorite passage of my mother -- a marvelous woman." The two go together. She could have told me her troubles. She could have told me the way her mother's character was developed. The reason? - - She believed in the hand of God to take all of the pieces and put them together.

....I wouldn't want to live a single day if it weren't possible to believe that . . .

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"CASE STUDY IN HOW TO HANDLE A PROBLEM"

John 6:1-15

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

When Harry Emerson Fosdick, bless his soul, was the Pastor of Riverside Church in Manhattan, he coupled with his responsibilities there the position of being head of the Department of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary, close by. It was in its hey-day, and students who had the good fortune to sit at his feet still remember a bit of advice that he gave to them when they came to his preaching class. He gave them to understand, among other things, that their preaching would be most effective if they could always remember that before the preacher, no matter how many people there would be present, behind every face, within every heart, there would be a problem....

> ..."let your preaching, then, become that effective, that when you preach, you're able to meet the needs of people who have problems . . ."

The talk-back sermon - this sermon is most effective which speaks to your need

For the grace of God, you see, is sufficient to do that very thing. And happy indeed is that preacher who commits himself to the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, for all who hear him will be people who are problem-laden.

We all have problems. That's the point at which this sermon begins, with the somber recognition of that truth. Every single one of you is a person with a problem, or a series of problems. And if you should be naive enough to think that you don't have a problem, then the comment that's made in G. Bernard Shaw's "Dr. Cannock"(?) may be meant for you when the doctor says, "If you think you are well, it's because you do not know that you are sick." There are people who have problems, whether they realize it or not.

KNOCK

Some of us have lived to the point where we know that the older we become, we simply exchange one set of problems for another! That seems to be the nature and the character of the living of our years. There was a time, honestly now, when we allowed ourselves to believe that we could reach a point, a plateau-of-sorts, where we could coast and throw ourselves into neutral, that we might be free of problems. But that day is yet to come! It just isn't on the horizon. And for those of us who have lived a little bit longer than the rest of you, this is what we're able to say to you: life is a constant challenge, the exchange of one set of problems for another.

Now I realize, of course, that there are problems that come to us, not of our own making. We have no control over them. We find ourselves in a situation, and this is what confronts us. We didn't design it. We didn't wish it. It has simply come to us. Life has a way of thrusting problems in front of us....

> ....and on the other hand, I have to admit to you, sadly enough, that there are some problems that are created by people. They create their own problems. When I first came to the Maryland Synod I had an interview with the President of the Synod, now the man who is the President Emeritus, my highly esteemed and trusted friend, Dr. J. Frank Fife. Among other things he said to me, "Sure, we have problem congregations in our synod, and we have problem pastors. And some of those pastors are problems just because they create their own problems."

Well now, having said all of this, I want to tell you that what I'm saying to you now in this sermon is inspired by today's Gospel lesson. Do

you remember it? Matthew is not the only one who recorded the incident. It seemed to be popular with most of the Gospel writers. John also has quite an account of it. It's the most popular of all the miracles. As any Sunday School pupil knows, name the list of miracles, and invariably included in the list will be the Feeding of The Five Thousand.

I suppose if you had a sanctified imagination at this moment, you could picture yourself saying to Matthew or to John, "Tell me, what was it like when you were with Jesus? Take any given day -- give us an account of it."

....and Matthew or John might say, "Well - - " (as they remembered this day) - - "It was almost like any other day, and yet we who were with Christ had come to understand that <u>any</u> day eventually became absolutely glorious! He was the kind of person who had a way of making wonderful things happen sooner or later."

Well, that was a great day. Five thousand men, Matthew says, came to hear Him preach. The women and the children they didn't even count. Matthew probably would have said to us -- I think you can put it this way -- "I never heard Him preach the way He preached that day. His voice was so strong and clear, and if the people who sat right in front of Him could hear Him clearly and distinctly, so I think if people who would have been seated in the opposite part of the valley, His voice would have been heard as clearly and as distinctly. He gave us those unforgettable pictures about God, how much God loves us. He told us how much God needs us....He told us or the way we ought to live with one another. He just went on preaching and preaching and preaching, until now when I look back and think of it, it must have been for hours . . . "

" . . . It occurred to Him, or did it occur to one of us, I don't quite remember any more . . "

(The accounts differ between Matthew and John)

" . . It occurred to one of us, or to Him, that here were

all these people, who, so it would seem, sat under Him spell-bound, and forgot to take time to eat. And now they had to get back home. . . "

And as the recorder said:

"Many of them would faint by the way."

I presume it could have been a day such as the days we're experiencing right now. I've experienced this kind of weather there, day after day. So with His concern for the people, that they ought to have nourishment, the question is raised, "Where are we going to get the bread to feed them?"

Now having said all of this, recognize at once that this incident, the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, is basically a case study in how to handle a problem. Maybe you never thought of it in that way before. But that's precisely what it is. And when you go back and remember what happened, you'll discover all over again certain techniques and procedures by which to handle a problem effectively.

First, this is what you do. You recognize that you have a problem on your hands. And that's exactly what happened. Somebody called it by name. Unfortunately, I have to tell you this, there are some people who never begin at that point, and consequently they never learn how to begin to handle their problems. They never reach the point where they recognize they have a problem on their hands!

This is one of the toughest things that comes to us in dealing with people, to get them to admit that a problem exists, or maybe that they're either part of the problem or the problem itself. To the everlasting credit of those involved in this incident -- hurriedly, quickly, they called the problem by name. They recognized it. Now that's the point at which you begin.

Then the second step is: you look around, you try to make a kind of

inventory. You not only assess the situation but you assess your resources: Do you now have anything at hand by which you could begin? Anything. - - that's the key word - - or Something. Not how much, but is there anything that can serve as a kind of a handle? Lo and behold, they looked around, and somebody observed, "Why, here's a youngster and he has his lunch with him" - - wonderful! Not much, but you begin to assess the scene for available resources. That's the second step.

Now unfortunately I have to tell you this, that there are some people who will go that far, but as soon as they go that far they begin to think negatively.....which is exactly what happened on that occasion. Somebody with a chorus of voices began to say: "What's that boy's lunch among so many?"

Let me give vent to my feelings for the moment, indulge me quickly, will you? I get so sick and tired sometimes when I sit down with a group of people, and then I have to sweat it out when I hear all the reasons why a thing can't work. It happens to be a habit with some people! They seem to be in duty bound to think negatively. I know it's part of my temperament to believe that a thing can work, and I become terribly impatient sometimes when I have to sweat it out with people who can tell me all the reasons why a thing can't get off the ground.

Now that doesn't mean that we ought not to think realistically, and that doesn't mean that we ought not to put a high value upon the practical side of things. But think what would have happened in the case of the incident that serves as the Gospel lesson for the day if that would have been only the point that would have been reached, where somebody would have said, "Here's a boy's lunch!" - - and everybody else would have said, "It doesn't

amount to anything -- you can't do anything with it."

Well the third step in handling a problem successfully and effectively is, you turn over your limited resources to a greater hand than yours. The miracle began to happen as soon as they took the little and gave it into the hand of Jesus Christ. God never made any of us big enough to handle all the problems of life by himself. When will we ever come to understand that we are dependent creatures? We were not meant to operate independently of God. God waits for us to turn to Him. God always has a plan, and God's wisdom is always greater.

I reminded our youngsters from Tent Troupe who were present here this morning, I thought when I saw them perform so very well "Lilies of The Field" ....how a sequel to that is a story that's being portrayed actually by some of our Lutheran sisters who came from Germany, and how they came to the United States and how they've gone to Palestine because they have been guilt-stricken by what the Nazis did to the Jews, and they're trying to re-pay the debt. And they've established little settlements that practice and live out dai daily Christian compassion. Well the Mother Superior of that outfit has written a number of books, the title for one of them is this: "God Is Always Greater." And when you and I have problems confronting us, we need to remember that God's wisdom is always greater than ours. God's strength is always greater than ours.

In the solving of a problem, these are the points, then, that we do well to remember:

- - call the problem by name.....
- - learn to begin with what you have at hand, no matter

> how seemingly insignificant.....and honestly now, I'm convinced that there's always enough by which to begin -- not very much, perhaps, not enough perhaps to give you

giantlike strides at once, but a little.....

- - and the third step is to <u>trust completely the hand of God to deal with the matter.</u>

Now there's one other word that I need to share with you, even as I need to share it with myself: the heart of this whole miracle lies in the thrust of compassion. God is love. That's why we define Him. And love always thinks in the terms of the needs of other people.

Do you know that there are some problems that we never get resolved because we never get beyond thinking of ourselves. We're always zeroing in on ourselves and on ourselves alone. So frequently in our inter-personal relationships, we'll never get our problems resolved as long as we keep thinking in terms <u>only</u> of ourselves. And as soon as that little boy got himself off dead-center, took his lunch and begin in thinking in terms of other people - - the miracle began to happen. And the problem was resolved.

You've never tried this strategy before?

The technique's a bit strange to you?

....let's try it -- today -- tomorrow at the latest.

Let's not put it off.

When we truly follow Christ - we face all of life, whatever the problem, confronted to act out of love - love is the way to handle any problem

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost August 17, 1975

"ACCEPTING YOURSELF"
or
"The You You Happen To Be . . . . . " (Matthew 15:21-28)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I want to think with you for a little while about today's Gospel lesson. Now let me at the very beginning take you into my confidence. If today I were seated in the congregation, and I heard the preacher go to the sacred desk and say that he wanted to think with you about the Gospel lesson, I'd move toward the edge of my seat . . . because I'd be saying to myself, this is what I have been waiting for - - I want to see how he handles this passage of Scripture.

Quite honestly, I've shied away from it. In the more than thirty-five years that God has given me the privilege to go to the sacred desk, I think I've preached only two or three times upon this Gospel lesson for the day. I'm reasonably certain that I've never done it justice, and you may think it's a bit vain of me now to come to this sacred desk and attempt it again.

Let me tell you why I feel this way. It isn't an easy passage of Scripture to understand, especially if you read it superficially, and most of us do. Frankly now, when we deal with Scripture a lot of us just give it a casual look, the edge is blunt a bit because of familiarity, and then it doesn't make an impact. But in this case, no matter how casually we read it, we're jolted a bit because we're given an exposure of Jesus Christ that just doesn't quite fit the regular album. Be patient with me now and I'll recite this incident.

It was near the end of the ministry of our Blessed Lord. I think He knew very well what was in front of Him. He recognized that last week in Jerusalem, and the terrible, terrible price He would have to pay. Maybe He wanted a respite, and so He got about as far north in Palestine as I think He ever went. Do you suppose He went there just to get away from people? It could have been so.

> ....but at any rate, as He was about to leave that section of the country, a woman ran after Him -- if you please, a heathen woman, not of the Jewish faith. And as she ran after Him she screamed, as anyone who has been in the Middle East knows how an emotional woman can behave, she made quite a scene.....and would you believe it, this compassionate, concerned Jesus Christ seemingly ignores her.

You would have thought, if you wanted a regular portrait of Him, that He would have said, "What can I do for you, kind one? -- you're so distressed, you're so distraught. I've come to help people. I have a blessing for you. Why have you waited so long?" . . . presumably He might have said, "I have been in your territory for a week, now I'm about to leave."

....He didn't talk like this at all. In fact, He gave her the silent treatment! And that's what causes some of us to get a bit uptight when we read this passage of Scripture, because we just can't picture Jesus Christ giving anyone the silent treatment.

Some of us have gotten it from people. It's a terrible experience, to want to be recognized, to want to be spoken to, to want our presence to be felt, and then to be ignored. To be ignored by God! To be ignored by Jesus Christ! Now can you understand why I'd be seated on the edge of the pew, waiting to see how a preacher is going to handle a passage of Scripture such

[illegible] - - ! - - where at the very beginning we've told about a Christ who [illegible] respond with compassion to a woman who came pleading for help.

[illegible] only that, but as the incident continues, it's the disciples who get into the act, and the disciples who, for whatever may have been their motivation, say, "Give her some kind of attention! Send her away! Can't you hear how she's crying?" . . . whether their motivation was noble or base, the fact remains they would have paid some attention to her, while He Himself seemingly remains insensitive.

Then a dialogue does begin. When she cries out for help, He says something to this effect: "It isn't right to take bread and to give it to dogs" . . . . He also said something about He wasn't sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And there you get two things in one: a discriminating Christ - - "I have blessings for some people but I don't have blessings for you" - - - it just doesn't fit in your picture of Christ, does it now? [illegible] this gratifying [illegible] - - "It isn't right to take bread and to give it to dogs."

. . . Well, the upshot is, she's the persistent one. Granted He gets this kind of treatment: she just doesn't take No for an answer.

When I was a kid I used to be impressed by the way stories would begin. I was fascinated by "Once upon a time . . . ." Now then I become fascinated by the way stories ended - - " . . . and they all lived happily ever after." And I sound myself, unconsciously remembering how stories end rather than by the way they begin. And then, I suggest to you, is what you and I need to do about this woman. Troubled and difficulty [illegible] the way it may be and conditions [illegible] the way it ought. For the story ends in this manner in spite of what [illegible] ways to her something that [illegible] way to the twelve disciples, I think - - - he said to her, "You have [illegible] faith, woman, and [illegible] what you've asked

for." And the miracle is performed.

Now let's back up a bit. Let me indicate to you the courage that I have in dealing with this passage of Scripture this morning.

To begin with, I want to tell you this, that I think you and I have to remember that Jesus Christ was never anything less than a gentleman, and despite His silence, He's never less than God. And even though He doesn't jump when we snap our fingers, that doesn't mean that He's less than compassionate. He is concerned. And His interest is always in us. What He does for us, He does because of what it may do for us. You have to remember that.

Now I think it's also helpful to remember that when He said something about "It's not fit to take bread and cast it to dogs" -- that if you had the benefit of the original translation, you've discovered it wasn't nearly as harsh on her ears as it is in ours. It was just kind of a statement that happened to have been made which indicated: "Wait now -- are you sure you deserve what you're asking for? How can you prove to me that you ought to have this blessing?" . . . which leads me to say to you very quickly that all people have some measure of faith, and this basically is an incident that deals with faith. You can't have miracles without faith, don't ever forget that! Miracles just don't happen. The basic ingredient of faith is always essential.

Some people have faith, a little faith, and Jesus Christ was constantly taking the disciples to task because He said, "O ye of little faith." Any number of people I know wish that their faith could be increased. Right now in this congregation -- she's not present at this service, so I can speak in this manner, and you wouldn't recognize her anyway -- there's a woman in this congregation with whom I have had three counseling sessions within the last month. And each time the burden of concern is always this: "Pastor, I don't

have as much faith as I ought to have. I want to have more faith." And this basically is her problem. And one of the things she needs to recognize is that you don't get faith just by wishing for it.

Much to our amazement, faith is born out of struggle. If Jesus Christ treated her the way He did, He treated her because He wanted to give her the proving-ground by which her faith would be supremely tested, give her the chance so that ultimately He could say to her, "What's going to happen now is because your faith is that great."

Helmut Thielicke, bless his soul, the great German preacher, perhaps touching more people in the name of Jesus Christ than anyone of his generation, has dealt with this very same subject. And he recites the account of a woman who came to him and said, "I have faith - - I go to an opera, I go to a concert, I'm deeply moved, I come back, and I think how wonderful God is. And I believe in Him. But then the next day the storms of life assail me, the rains descend, and I find it difficult to believe." It's easy to believe when everything is wonderful. But the integrity of faith is revealed when one goes on believing when the night is dark and the night is long.

...so Jesus Christ puts her to the test, to see how much faith she really had.

And would you believe me if I were to tell you that it all began when she reached the point of accepting herself for what she was in the sight of Jesus Christ? No man ever gets God to pay attention to him because he storms the gates of Heaven and demands attention on his own right. There are any number of us who are denied a blessing because we strut into the presence of God. One of the most difficult things for most of us is to accept ourselves as we are, and especially in the sight of God.

Most of us have a very good impression of ourselves. Most of us think that we don't deserve the blows that come to us. Most of us think that when we get a crippling blow, that it should have been diverted, and that if God is any kind of a good God, He wouldn't have allowed it to happen to us.

I know whereof I speak. I have a colleague in the ministry who today is a stalwart, a giant of the faith. When God took from him his first love, when God took from him his help-meet, when God took from him the mother of his two children, he tells me now he went out into the dark of night and he even shook his fist into the face of Heaven and said, "God, you can't do this to me!" - - not that God had done it to him. But even if you take the other side of the coin and translate it this way: "God, why did you allow this to happen to me?"

Pastor David very wisely selected his staff for camp. He knows how important it is that the sheer strength of the personality of the teacher carries its full weight in the classroom. And as precious as any staff member that he'll have there this week is a woman who used to be a member of this parish but who since moved away, who has as many fine qualities in her soul as any woman I know. Once in a retreat session at Bethany I probed and I asked her how she got that way. Then she revealed certain chapters in her life when she struggled with God, when she wrestled with God, when God put her to the test, just to see how seriously she really was taking Him and His apparent silence.

My friend, I come to this sacred desk to tell you that while there may be certain things about this passage of Scripture that you can't understand, I implore you, try to bring some measure of understanding to this aspect of it: that a miracle was performed - - - that Jesus Christ did say to this woman ultimately, "Your faith is great" . . . but it happened only after she began to accept herself as being unworthy . . . as being unworthy.

It's one of the hardest lessons for us to learn. We're a proud, sophisticated people. In my devotions this morning, long before some of you were up, I read this magnificent liturgy of our Church as though I had not read it before. And I reflected upon the thought and said: If I were to be part of a group of Christians to write the liturgy today, would we be as honest as that,, as they were when this liturgy was written years ago? Would we begin as they began, by saying,

> "We poor sinners . . confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean" . . ?

To the everlasting credit of another generation, they called a spade a spade, and they recognized sin for what it was, and their own unworthiness. No wonder sometimes we look back and say, there were giants in those days.

> "O woman, be it unto thee, for thy faith is great"

...but it began by recognizing her unworthiness.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
St. Bartholomew, Apostle August 24, 1975

"CASE STUDY ON HOW TO WIN
FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE"
(John 1:43-51)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

My eye fell upon the article on one of the inside pages of the New York Times yesterday. It bears the title: "THE RING TELLS ALL". This is the first paragraph . . .

> "It's black, it's amber, it's bright blue, it's violet. It's this month's throwaway chic, a $45 whimsey that has had hundreds of conspicuous consumers storming the jewelry counter at Bonwit Teller.
>
> The mood stone ring, for that is its name, is billed as a 'portable biofeedback aid' that supposedly monitors levels of tension, relaxation and emotions in the wearer. It changes color, theoretically, as one's mood changes . . "

Interesting, isn't it? If you're not sure whether you're uptight or not, you simply glance down at the ring on your finger and you'll know how your mood is registering there. If you're beginning to relax, and hopefully that's true, the ring will tell you.

I'm wondering what would have happened if the man who's remembered today in the calendar of the Saints would have had the benefit of such a ring. I want to talk to you a little bit about him. You can call him either Nathanáel or you can call him Bartholomew. He's known by either of those names.

He is numbered as one of the Twelve. Perhaps it's been quite a while since you've recited for yourself the names of the twelve disciples, and maybe when you did start to number them, you couldn't quite remember him.

There isn't too much that's known about him. He's not remembered as a miracle-worker.....he's not remembered as a preacher of great sermons.... ....he's not remembered as an organizer of the churches. He is remembered as some people ought to be remembered, not only for the answer that they give but for the questions that they ask.

You see, he's the one who was told by Philip that "We just met Jesus Christ, the man from Nazareth" - - and this man Nathanael immediately counters by asking cynically, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

.....now that stone in the ring on his finger,
you see, would be indicating doubt and cynicism.....

It changes. Something very wonderful happened. For in reality this Gospel lesson for today -- you can read it for yourself in that first chapter of John -- is a case study in how to win friends and influence. Jesus Christ was a master at that. You're not forgetting, are you, that He began everything that we now enjoy today, simply by making a tremendous investment in certain people, winning their confidence, drawing out the best that was within them, and giving them courage to believe that they were the kind of thing upon which the Church of Jesus Christ could be founded.

Let's look at this chapter again, that portion which serves as the Gospel for today. Episode One: Philip says to Nathanael (or Bartholomew) "We've found him, and he's from Nazareth!"

...Mood #1: Cynicism and doubt - - "Can any good
thing come out of Nazareth?"

Now how does Jesus Christ respond to this kind of a reaction on the part of a man? Jesus Christ says to him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in

whom there is no guile!" Can you imagine something like that! Usually when you and I discover that someone doesn't think very well of us, our defences begin to mount. We become irritated and annoyed, because most of us have a pretty good impression of ourselves. And it troubles us a bit to be short-changed or short-circuited immediately by someone who hasn't even talked with us, and takes a rather dim view of who we are and what we are. But you never win a friend by countering in like manner. Jesus Christ says to this man who says, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" - - "Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no guile!" It's the master-stroke. He says something good about him.

In our interpersonal relationships how vastly different they could be if you and I were always looking for the good that lies within someone, and call it by name.

I consider myself very fortunate when Pastor David asked me to serve on the staff of the week at Nawakwa that was concluded yesterday. I consider myself fortunate for several reasons. First, it gave me an opportunity to live for a week not only with teenagers but with staff as well. And then to discover how again and again throughout the course of the week that exceptionally fine staff was always appealing to the hetter side of each one of these youngsters. You see, the staff did go up there last Saturday. The campers didn't arrive until Sunday afternoon. That time between Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon was spent in proper orientation in which the dynamic was being established in each of the staff members for the responsibility that rests upon him to look for the best, and to build upon it.

I would be less than honest with you, of course I would be, if I didn't tell you that I had my moments during the week when I discovered some youngsters at less than their best. They had their moments when the other side

of their nature had the ascendency. We're like that too, and we're very honest about it, aren't we? I told you last week when we came together, the high regard that I have for this magnificent liturgy of the Lutheran Church, because when we come together at the very beginning each Lord's Day, we admit that we're less than we ought to be. We're honest enough to brand ourselves sinners. But we happen to have a God who when He looks at us, just doesn't settle for the fact that we're sinners. We're sinners who can be redeemed. To the day we die, even though we remain sinners, we're in the process of being saved. And I'd like to believe, no matter how you may see it, that every time we come together in this place we're appealing to the better side of each one of us.

It's no easy glib phrase when we say we put on our Sunday-best. I once heard it said that a lawyer sees people at their worst, a physician sees people just as they are -- you can't keep anything from a physician, when he begins to probe and diagnose -- and a pastor ordinarily sees people at their best. And this is not bad! For according to the Christian tradition, God is always appealing to our better side. God is always telling us that we're not meant to go to hell. God is always telling us that we're meant to become Heaven-bound. And so He begins with Nathanael, or Bartholomew if you please, and He says something good about him. And I suppose then if Nathanael were wearing that stone or that ring, he'd look at it and see how it began to brighten up, for this does something to a man, to have someone believe in him, and to begin at that point.

And then Nathanael, in this conversation that becomes part of the Gospel for the day: "How do you know me?" And this is exceedingly interesting - - then Jesus brings to his attention, He said, "I saw you sitting under the fig tree." Now what in heaven's name, you say to yourself, does that mean? What

did we understand by that?

Well, scholars agree, I dare say, that in those days when a man sat under the fig tree, he sat there to meditate and to reflect upon spiritual things . . . or he just sat there because he was indolent, lazy, wanted to withdraw, to get away from people, to goof off.

It's important to notice the construction that Jesus Christ puts upon this. He gives him the benefit of the doubt. He places a high and noble value upon what he was doing. That's our Lord for you! He's always giving us the benefit of the doubt. He's always putting the finer construction upon the thing that we're doing....

> ....now look at that ring on his finger, had he been wearing it -- think how the color would change now, as confidence is being built up and courage is being re-established, to know that you've finally found someone who is willing to believe something good about you!

And the ultimately Nathanael (or Bartholomew if you please) says to Him, "Thou art the Son of God - - Thou art the King of Israel'" - - the moment-of-moments eventually arrived, and we're given the opportunity to see Jesus Christ as He is - - unique - - a Saviour - - precious.

> ....now what does the ring register, had he been wearing one? What now would the stone tell us?

....well in the calendar of the Church we remember this may today, by the question that he asked and the answer that he gave, and the encounter that he had with Jesus Christ.

In my study here at the church, just around the corner here, I have hanging on the wall, in a frame, inscribed on parchment paper, a verse of Scripture, if you please, that serves as the dynamic for my ministry among you. It's the way the first chapter of Paul's Letter to the Colossians ends:

> "So, naturally, we proclaim Christ! We warn everyone we meet, and we teach everyone we can, all that we know about him, so that we may bring every man up to his full maturity in Christ. This is what I am working and struggling at, with all the strength that God puts into me."

I hope that after all these years you've discovered the intent of my soul, by the grace of God, to look for that better side of your nature, to build upon it, to believe in it. And if there is any reservoir of good will among this congregation, it lies in the fact that that's the way we look upon one another, even as we honestly believe that God is always looking for our better side, and building upon it.

It's a happy thought, I dare say, in all of our interpersonal relationships, for no man is ever so bad that he should be marked off any man's list. Everyone's entitled to the belief that the good that lies within him can be brought out, and developed. Some of you have come as far as you have just because people think that of you . . . pass it on, my friend....pass it on.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost August 31, 1975

"GOOD MEN CAN GIVE BAD ADVICE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Would you believe it, the first young woman to capture the heart of the founding father of the Rockefeller fortune, old John D. himself, turned him down - - that is, upon the advice of her mother. When her mother found that she was interested in him, presumably she took her aside and she said, "You'd better lose interest in that man, because his future doesn't seem very bright."

...an aspiring young artist applied for a position with a Kansas City newspaper. The editor examined the artist's drawings, shook his head: "Young man, you don't have any talent. Let me advise you to get into something else where you might have a chance to succeed . . . " Walt Disney, the creator of Mickey Mouse and goodness knows what else, did not take the editor's advice . . . . .

...his name was Chauncey DePew. A limited number of you might recognize the name, he was at one time a leading railroad executive. A relative of his had come to him for advice. It was possible to buy some Ford Motor Company stock. Chauncey DePew advised against it, saying that "Nothing has come along that can beat the horse . . . "

...the editor of the Chicago Times in 1885 advised against any kind of significant consideration to what now has been referred to as Abraham Lincoln's immortal Gettysburg Address. Having advised his colleagues, he justified that counsel with these words: "The cheek of every American must tingle with shame when he reads

the silly, flat and dish-watery utterances of a man who has to be pointed out to foreigners as the President of the United States . . . "

...one afternoon a school teacher decided to go visiting into the homes of her seven-year-old pupils. She was the kind of woman who felt constrained to advise people. This is what happened in one home in particular: "I don't like to tell you this, Mrs. Edison, but I sincerely believe that your son Tom is mentally retarded - - I don't expect too much from him . . . "

...the Wright brothers and their flying machine . . . they had an older brother, a preacher, a bishop no less, who said, "Flying is reserved for angels. To think of anything else is blasphemy . . "

...they were all good men who gave advice, but the advice that they gave was bad.

Now that's the title for today's sermon: "When Good Men Give Bad Advice." It's triggered by a thought or two of a particular text in today's Gospel lesson. It's from the 16th chapter of Matthew. It all has to deal with a bit of advice that a good friend of Jesus decided to give the Master. The text is the kind of reply that Jesus gave to a good man who was about to advise him rather poorly -- strong words, if you please: "Get thee behind me, Satan."

Now honestly, one might admit that most of us are so constituted that we don't take advice very willingly. Sometimes we wish that we had. The judgment of other people is superior to ours. But on the other hand -- do remember this -- there is another side to it. There are those of us who have sought out other people to get their advice and counsel because we believe them to be good men. But when they gave us their advice it turned out to be bad. It can happen.

Now this sermon is meant to be quite relevant, honestly, because most of us are either giving advice, or getting it. We have friends like that. And we want to be that kind of a friend to them. Some folks at the drop of a hat, without any encouragement at all, will tell you precisely what they think of what to do.....and more often than we care to admit, they do influence us, for good, or for ill.

Now when it comes to religious matters, we do well to take a study, as quickly as we can this morning, in the life of our Blessed Lord. For there were times when He turned down advice, even though it came from good people. I'm impressed by the fact that when I read the Bible, one of the writers decided to put it this way, that when Jesus chose the twelve disciples, He chose them that they might be with Him. Human as He was, He did enjoy so much their friendship and their companionship. And you know we look upon ourselves as being well-blessed when we can be surrounded by people, and a select number at that, if you please, those who become part of the inner circle.

Well Jesus had His inner circle, and as they moved around from place to place in Galilee and Judea, I can picture them as they would sit down and just talk -- stimulating -- encouraging -- it gave Him a chance to put His finger upon their spiritual pulsebeat, even as He took the spiritual pulsebeat of others as He took their reading. And then with I think at least one of them reached the level of his relationship with Jesus Christ when he felt perfectly at ease to advise Jesus Christ, to give Him counsel. And that's about the upshot of today's Gospel lesson. Had you listened carefully while the Gospel was being read -- and of course you did! -- you may remember now that in that Gospel lesson Jesus is talking about going up to Jerusalem, predicting the kind of end that's going to come to Him -- He's going to die -- it's going to come off like that!

He's also indicating something about if anybody wants to come after Him, he'd better think in terms of sacrifice, bearing a cross.

> ...now if you'll allow me to do it, with some degree of speculation by way of a sanctified imagination, I think that it's at this point when Peter either blurts out in front of the other disciples, or he sidles up to Jesus and he says, "Do you mind if we talk a little bit when the others go
>
> > away -- confidentially.....well, no matter which way it happened, I'm inclined to think it went like this: "Master, you really didn't mean what you said, did you? - - You'd better think it over. You're telling us, you see, that we've signed up with a loser! -- that's the impression people are going to get . . . . and, Master, things have been going along quite well, and if you start changing your tone now, and start talking about sacrifice, and cross-bearing, you're going to turn some of these people off!
>
> "...you know what, Jesus, if I were you I'd get these people back together and tell them that you've had second thoughts on this, that maybe you were just in a dark mood when you spoke this way ...or perhaps tell them if they did get this impression, you didn't intend to give it - - - why don't you do it, Jesus, before it's too late . . . "

Well, whether he talked like that or not, I don't know, but I do know that whatever he said made enough of an impact on Jesus Christ that Jesus said to Peter, "You're talking like the devil -- get behind me! Get away from me! - - don't give me any more lip like this! - - - " Really now! Peter was a good man.

He was giving bad advice. He was saying it simply from the human perspective, and ruled out completely the God-factor.

What happened a couple of times in the life of Jesus Christ when good men gave bad advice? As an example, there was the time when things were going along handsomely -- really they were! -- in fact so well that people came and said, "He's our man! -- we'll make him king." And immediately they responded, encouragingly so, "Great idea! Why didn't we think of it? - - "

> ....and like as not, if one began to picture himself with his portfolio -- Minister of Defense.....Minister of Finance.....Minister in Charge of the Provinces.....
> .....now the time had come, propitiously so, when the whole order would be changed! This man is made of radical stuff!
> -- give him a chance -- come on, Jesus, now's your time - - !"

Undoubtedly that's the way some of them came and spoke to Him, when they recognized the climate of the day. The time was right to make Him King. ....good men - - but in the eyes of Jesus Christ it was bad advice, because Jesus Christ knew full well that simply changing a social order is never enough. Not that the social order may not need changing, but what in heaven's name would it do any good to change an order if you simply put the same old bad lot of sinners in charge" You change the man, then hopefully the change is reflected in the order itself. Good men . . . bad advice.

Then I'm inclined to think also, that other incident when a good man came to Him under cover of darkness. He had his reasons, I don't fault him for that. His name was Nicodemus -- tremendously in earnest...impressed by Jesus Christ. And I think the two of them got along swimmingly until Jesus Christ started talking about regeneration, conversion, being born again. And I'd like to think that Nicodemus said, "Well, Jesus, if you don't mind, I'd like to give you a bit of advice - - you'll get to first base, second base,

-- you'll even make a home run if you keep talking about how nice it is to be good to one another -- do you remember how people responded when you preached that great sermon on the mount? -- you had them standing and waiting and waiting, weighing every word, and jubilantly so -- that's the kind of thing you want to talk about -- peace of mind, and how to get along with people - - -

> "....and I'm telling you, Jesus, if you start talking to them the way you're talking to me, about being born again, this conversion bit, they're not going to listen to you! They're not going to try and understand it. You're going to get them in over their depth. It isn't worth it!"

Jesus Christ refused the advice. Because He had come to change men's hearts. He had come to establish clearly the fact that the Kingdom of God is within a man, that men need to be born again, that they need this direct link between God and themselves -- when God takes over, and they find themselves the obedient servants.

I know whereof I speak. Most of you -- well, let me say it -- most of us, if somebody came up and looked us straight in the eye and said, "Brother, you know what troubles you? -- you don't have Jesus Christ in your heart. You haven't been born again." - - we'd get rid of that fellow as soon as we could.

> ....but if somebody came up to us and said, "You have trouble getting along with people? You don't have peace of mind? Here's my pamphlet: 'How To Get Along With People' -- 'How To Make Fifty Thousand in Five Years' - - read it!".....we'd listen to that fellow.

Well, let me go back. Most of us are either giving advice or getting it. It is terribly important. One of the books that I cherish through the years is Leslie Weatherhead's "The Transforming Friendship." Weatherhead establishes the fact very well that God's preferred instrument is through people. Sometimes some of us go to certain people because we want them to advise us, to give us

counsel. As Christians I say to you with all the strength that I can command, when you find yourself in a position to be asked for advice and counsel, be sure you don't sell God short. Always see that you introduce the God-factor, to look at a situation from God's point of view.

If you don't mind my telling you this, I'm invariably awed by the fact that some of you come to me for counsel. And if a pastor is worth his salt, you shouldn't hesitate to go to him for counsel and advice. But speaking quite honestly, every now and then I discover that some people come to me because they simply want me to reinforce what they're already thinking and what they've already committed themselves to, and always it may not be salutary. You might be surprised how often some people come to the preacher, hoping that he might side with them in the course that they've decided to take that lacks a fair measure of integrity, that he might be able to rationalize with them....

> ....but time and again, people may not realize it, that when I'm talking with them, figuratively I'm on my knees, asking God to give me the strength to introduce and re-introduce the God-factor, so that whatever advice and counsel I may give may be from God's point of view.....

Some of us, to the day we die, will thank God for those to whom we went, good men, who gave us good advice. But I warn you by way of caution, it's also possible for good men to give bad advice. And God will hold us responsible for the kind of advice we give. Did you ever think about that?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 28, 1975

"BEYOND IMPULSE"
(Matthew 21:28-32)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Leslie D. Weatherhead was for a number of years the distinguished Pastor of City Temple Church in London, England. He traveled extensively here in the States and he was a prolific writer. In one of his books he has a very interesting illustration, keen student of human nature that he was. He tells about a chap who has been in some kind of business in a village in England, and then he decided to go to the big city, and he'd establish himself in London.

He was a stranger there, and he knew that it was very important that he should establish his business in the right area of London. So, once he got to London, and as he came up from the underground, or the subway, he acted on impulse, and he said to himself, I'll establish my business in that area when I see before me a white horse going in that direction....

....now I've never learned to this day whether it was a profitable thing for him to follow such advice, but this I can say to you, I don't recommend it.

Which leads me to ask the question immediately before anything else is said in this sermon: do impulses determine our character? - - or does a man's character determine his impulses?

Questions sometimes are determined by the kind of answers we're able to give. Some questions can be given a direct Yes or No answer. Some questions deserve a Maybe-Yes and a Maybe-No. Maybe that's one of those questions -- Are we what we are because of our impulses? . . or are our impulses what they are

because of our basic character?

Now I have been away from this pulpit for three weeks, and naturally when I am away I think of you, the people for whom God has given me a particular kind of responsibility. A pastor can never divorce his thinking from his people, and as I return to this sacred desk I said to myself, perhaps the first sermon that I could preach would be a sermon that deals with impulse. Because when you divide people into categories, maybe we divide them into those two categories: people who act upon impulse.....and people who don't act upon impulse - - - people who are impulsive/folks who are a bit restrained. But maybe upon reflection at the very moment, we may have to say to ourselves, that all of us, in one way or another, do act upon impulse, either the impulse to act or the impulse not to act.

Now having said all of that, let me tell you that I'm delighted to say this, that the Gospel lesson for the day speaks to this very problem. I don't know how well you listened to it. One ought always keep himself attuned to what is being read. And incidentally, that's one reason why we Lutherans stand when the Gospel is being read, because related to the teachings or the words of our Blessed Lord, or an incident in His life, we want to give it more-than-ordinary attention.

Now had that been your frame of mind when the Gospel was read today, this now is what you heard: a story that Jesus Christ told. He delighted in telling stories. He was never particularly interested in teaching abstract truths. Of course He was committed to basic principles and values, but whenever He wanted to talk about basic principles and values, He always clothed them in terms of human personality - - He'd always bring upon the scene somewhere people. Then He'd deliver His truth as He spoke about them. And like as not, He'd get their attention, as He got their attention on this occasion,

by saying, "What do you think?"

It's a master-stroke, of course. Happy indeed is that person who gets his people involved from the very beginning. He pays them a compliment. He's interested in the way they respond. He's interested in the way they may think. So Jesus began on this occasion by saying, "Now what do you think?" ...and then He continued to hold their attention as He gripped them by saying,

"A certain man had two sons . . . "

Well, that triggers all kinds of thoughts in your minds at once, because usually as soon as you say two -- you seldom think of two-of-a-kind. You usually think in terms of contrast and comparison. And again and ever so often Jesus would do that exactly, in this manner -- "two sons" -- then as it's being developed, we deal in terms of contrast and comparison. Even so today.

"A certain man had two sons . . . " ...alright, Jesus says, one of them was told to go into the field and do some work. He immediately said No. The other son was told the same thing, and he immediately said Yes. I'm suggesting to you that they acted on impulse. In all likelihood I can say this to you because the chap who said No, later on, upon reflection, changed his mind.

Now let this be said quickly: the chap who said Yes may have been the kind of fellow whose temperament was such that he never wanted to get into an argument with anyone. He wanted to ease himself out of the situation as quickly as he could. He wanted no hassle.....he wanted everything to be gracious. And maybe his temperament was such that he was always inclined to respond in the way that he thought people wanted him to respond - - as far as the future was concerned, he'd deal with that maybe later on. But for the immediate moment his temperament was such that he'd get out of the thing as quickly as he could,

as easily as he could. So the fellow who was asked to go into the field and work impulsively said, "Yes, of course I will" because he knew that was the answer that was expected. There are people like that.

You know people like that. Sometimes you're inclined to curse people who are like that, because ultimately they cause some of us a great deal of grief. This whole business of trying to see what answer they think we want to hear . . .

> . . . when I was a student studying for the ministry I was given good advice that I tried to remember -- I don't always remember it -- but, be careful with whom you associate, because you may find people in whose presence you ought to not linger overmuch because out of kindness to you, or sheer politeness, they may always agree with you.

Now for what it may be worth to you, and I'm not so sure that it can always stand on all fours, a wit once observed that when two people agree, maybe only one is doing the thinking.

Now let's look at the other fellow. He was asked to go to the field and do the same thing. And his immediate answer was a shocker -- "No, I won't go." Now I have to tell you very quickly that that was a shocker because this story takes place in the day when young men were taught to respect their elders. In fact, there was an old Jewish proverb which said "You never say no to the man with the beard" ....and in those days the beard was always the sign of veneration and age and maturity, and you respected it. Now as Jesus tells the story He tells about a chap who was asked to do something, and was bold enough to say No - disrespectfully so.

He, too, may have acted on impulse. Maybe that was his temperament. Maybe he saw that no good would come from his going into the field. Maybe he was inclined to think that he could spend his time more profitably elsewhere.

Or maybe he was the kind of a fellow whose temperament was such that he felt in duty bound always to say No when something was being advanced - - there are people like that. And you and I sit down at committee meetings with people like that, who can't possibly see the good of the thing that's being advanced, and impulsively (you can count on them, you can sense it) that's the immediate reaction.

Let's go back to the original question: do our characters determine our impulses? - - do our impulses determine our characters? I'm inclined to think sometimes that impulses are primarily a matter of temperament. But at the same time, according to the teaching of this lesson, Jesus also said:

"Afterwards - - "

which means, upon reflection. The chap who said No changed his mind and came back and delivered the goods! The fellow who said Yes never did produce. The moral, of course, is this: beyond impulse is reflection, the absolute necessity to reflect.....upon our opinions, our impressions, and even the decisions that we've already made.

With all the strength that I can command, let me suggest this to you, that you and I be very careful as we go through life lest we pass judgment upon those to whom we never give the chance to change their minds upon reflection. I wound up this vacation period of mine on a preaching mission down in the Shenandoah Valley, and twice during the past week I sat with ministers in one symposium after another. And I had the good fortune to think with them about about this wonderful calling which is ours in the Gospel ministry. And one of the things we said to each other is this: that we ought never to run out of patience as we deal with people, because there is always the possibility that a person who is negative towards Christ of changing his mind, whatever may be his motivation, his initial impulse or decision.

I have been wrestling in the recesses of my mind on a little essay that I'd like to write, that I have been asked to prepare, on TIME. What is time - - except God's precious gift to us, in order that we might reflect -- think through -- what we said or thought or did yesterday, in order that today we might profit by way of reflection. Impulse may be a matter of temperament, but acting upon impulse is nost certainly a basic matter of character. Now you think about that for a little while.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Festival of Praise October 19, 1975

"STAY ALERT!"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

When your Parsonage family first came to you, almost twenty years ago, we discovered that the folks back home were somewhat fascinated by the reports that we would share with them. Uncle Karl, Aunt Elizabeth, and Grossmudder in particular, were impressed that their kinfolk were now living within a half-hour of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue....or I dare say they were also impressed when we could tell them that within a half-hour we could walk on this campus or that campus of any one of four or five of the leading universities of the country, not far from where we lived.

But I suppose Uncle Karl sat on the edge of his seat when I told him that, in those days, it would be possible for us, when we turn the ignition key in the car at 9219 Manchester Road, and got through the traffic light at Four Corners, we could drive all the way to New York City without having to stop at the traffic light, that the only place we might have to stop would be at a toll booth on the New Jersey Turnpike.

Which leads me to say to you, my mind goes back quickly now to those trips that we went, either on church business to New York City or when we went up to get Jon established in Pratt Institute in Brooklyn...and occasionally as we would travel, we became aware of the fact that turnpike traveling could become very monotonous. We much preferred, of course, the by-ways of the highways, that took you hither and yon through this hamlet and that village -- always exceedingly interesting things to see, so it seemed to us.

But on the turnpike, one whizzes along, whiles away the hours in almost monotonous fashion. Small wonder, then, that the authorities on the New Jersey Turnpike would officially erect the flashing light that said KEEP AWAKE - - STAY ALERT. Under the spell of monotony one might find himself suddenly applying the brakes and coming to a screeching halt - - - because you see, there was a pile-up of traffic ahead of one, or to say nothing of the hazardous conditions that might confront you at certain times of the year on the highway. So the Turnpike Commission says: KEEP AWAKE - - STAY ALERT - - there could be danger ahead.

But as I come to the sacred desk this morning, I am happy to tell you that I am more interested, not in staying awake and keeping alert that I might avert danger, but for the moment at least I would stay alert and keep awake because life is like a highway itself, and life itself is a journey, and as you and I travel through life there are good and grand things to be seen. And unless we keep ourselves alert, unless we stay awake, we could miss them.

So it occurred to me when Winifred and I were traveling back from Canada this week -- (we had been up there for a preaching mission in Ontario, a most delightful experience) . . . now whether it was in New York State or in Pennsylvania, I can't tell you, but I do remember that as we were traveling along I did see this sign, and a free translation might be: "OOPS - YOU MISSED IT -- YOU'RE ALREADY BY IT". Someone had paid perfectly good money to erect that sign. You've seen signs like it -- "You're by it -- you passed it already." Evidently according to their thinking, there was something that we should have seen, and we ourselves would be the poorer in life because we didn't keep ourselves alert, to, I presume, what might have been previous warning signs, calling it to our attention.

The tragic thing about life is that so many people might spend it and

come to the end of their years and having missed so much. Would you believe it if I were to tell you that there's an old rabbinic saying that says something about "In the time of Judgment God will hold us responsible for every joy that we denied ourselves, for every good thing that we might have known."

Now there's a text for this brief meditation, but before I read the text I'm constrained to tell you that on this day when we feature a hymn-fest, we need to remind ourselves that the man who sings -- heartily -- is ordinarily the man who has seen something, who has experienced something that has caused him to sing.

On occasion when I am depressed It is a salutary thing for me to remember where my soul has been uplifted in days gone by. It's a salutary thing to travel along memory's lane and to go back to certain places where you did experience something good and wonderful. Every now and then I sit and I think when we went to Salsbury in England, and there was the tallest spire in all England gracing that cathedral....and down below at the base a blanket of green....

> ...I remember when we went to the Cathedral in Wells, where when you walk on the inside at certain hours of the day, how the sun forms the traceries that bow the head in gratitude and lift the soul in rejoicing. It's a salutary thing to look back and remember the days when a song began to emerge in your heart.....

But if these things are to happen, one has to be made sensitive to the nearness of such beauty, one must be kept alert, one must stay awake.

Well, here's the text. It's recorded in the Gospel according to Luke, the 9th chapter no less, the 32nd verse:

> "But Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, and it was, as they struggled into wakefulness, that we saw the glory of Jesus."

The reference, of course, is to the Transfiguration. Jesus and His precious companions had gone to a certain place. But the disciples were weary, but something was about to occur the like of which had not occurred before, and something that would leave an indelible mark upon the fabric of their hearts. And only as they struggled into wakefulness -- only as they forced themselves to stay awake, to be made alert, would they see Jesus - - in all His glory.

I have my moments when I become as despondent as you become despondent, when I think of all that's sordid and wicked in this world. But then I also have my moments when I realize that it's the best of all possible worlds -- a world upon which God has not turned His back! - - a world in which God still remains sovereign. And that's something worth singing about.

So I have a prayer that I offer to God each day. Wittingly or unwittingly it remains the same, "Dear God, make me sensitive. Keep me awake, keep me alert, to all the beauty, to the glory and the grandeur which remains." And because He answers that prayer and I respond to His goodness, occasionally I find something of the good and the grand in unexpected places, and at unexpected times.

Indulge me for a moment, will you, it's a personal reference. I held him in my arms, one time, and I remember to this very moment the glow in his eye when I think he was discovering for the first time a soaring jet in the sky. His brother at age four -- I found him one time, and I was fortunate enough to capture it on a color transparency....he was standing in a tomato patch, he had pushed back the green leaves, and that little hand of his was bringing to my attention the first blush of red on a tomato. And there was excitement in his eye.

He who is made sensitive can see these things. For shame upon me, how on occasion I have been caught up with their restlessness, their foibles,

their stupidity, and I have failed to see the beauty in their innocence. He who would walk through life and travel the highway must again and ever so often ask God to keep him sensitive to the beauty and the good that's just around the corner.....and that leads me to say something to you about your coming here every Sunday morning. Don't let it ever become commonplace! I say to Winifred's kinfolk practically every time that we go back to the hills of home, "I pray to God you never get used to this, but that each morning when you greet the day you thank God for the grandeur of the hills, the freshness of the air!"

Now, some of you come back here every Sunday. I hope it never becomes commonplace for you. I hope every time you come you're caught up with what we're about, to receive the claim of God upon our souls, to know that each Lord's day in this church He comes again and again - - to tell us a number of tremendous truths, and not the least among them is that He loves us, and forgives us, and that He needs us. Stay awake! -- keep alert! These things are happening.

I like the way the fellow put it when he said:

> "Earth's crammed with heaven,
> And every common bush afire with God,
> But only the man who sees takes off his
> shoes and worships - -
> The rest sit around and eat blackberries."

As God gives me breath, I hope I'll remain sensitive to the fact that there is always some good thing lurking around the corner....and meant to be enjoyed! Because as we enjoy, so we sing.

And that leads me to tell you that that's the way it is with God. See Him as He is! Someone who loves us, someone who gave His Son to be our Saviour. And because this is true we have someone to sing about!

Now I want to close in perhaps an unusual way - - I hope you won't mind. I'm going to read for you a prayer, a prayer offered by a Catholic priest, no

less, up in Belmont, Massachusetts a few years ago when he was asked to attend a banquet in a public place. And I suppose those who were present braced themselves for a very solemn prayer uttered in funereal tones. But, bless his soul, he was sensitive to the fact that it was a good thing that was happening, people were gathering together -- they were going to enjoy fellowship. He wanted to make sure that they were sensitive to this, that they would make the most of it. So this is the way he prays:

> "Almighty God, our Father and friend, we know that Your memory of earthly banquet halls is pretty grim, ever since that first Christmas Eve when an insolent fellow in a greasy apron at the only hotel in town slammed the door right in your mother's pleading face - - well the mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine. And here we are today, 20 centuries later, on a continent that the innkeeper never knew existed, speaking in a language that he never heard . . . and our very first thought before we sit down to our banquet tables is to stand in reverence and to salute Your undying name.
>
> We're especially happy to make this prayer. And, O Lord, we hope that You hear it. Because this time we're not in church, and this time we're not in trouble. As a rule, when we speak to You, we're either kneeling, against the background of a stained glass window - or buckling on a life preserver - - - it's either the routine of religion, or the rush call for help. But today it is gloriously different. Today we want you to bless our joy as we stand poised for a few hours of genial festivity.
>
> Bless us, then, O Lord, and in Thy goodness grant that the food may be well favored, the service smooth, and if it isn't asking too much - - the speeches short!"

...so he prayed, caught up with a measure of ecstasy for something good that was about to happen.

Well, you and I are here today caught up in ectasy because of something good that did happen, and continues to happen, because God sent His Son into the world to claim us. Before we finish our hymn-sing, we'll include this one, your favorite:

O Lord, my God,
When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds
Thy hands have made -
I see the stars,
I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout
The universe displayed.

....and then so spontaneously:

Then sings my soul
My Saviour, God, to Thee:
How great Thou art!
How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul
My Saviour God to Thee:
How great Thou art!
How great Thou art!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Reformation Sunday October 26, 1975

"PROVE IT"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

On this day throughout all of Christendom the lengthened shadow of the Monk of Wittenberg is cast. I think I feel it significantly so as we gather together here. I'll even go a step farther than that, my friend, and I think I can visualize the presence of Martin Luther himself, seated somewhere, perhaps alongside of you.

And would you believe it, up to this point as we've gone from one experience to another, there's a broad, happy, wholesome German grin on his face. I think he smiled particularly when he heard that the very first hymn that we would sing would be the hymn that he himself had written, inspired as it was from his study of Psalm 46....

> ....and then surely I saw him smile again when he saw that we came back to it again during the anthem period... ...while the lessons were being read I could see him nod his head approvingly, for each of those lessons typifies in no small way the truth of the Gospel as he proclaimed it so earnestly, that a man is saved by faith and by faith alone.... ...and that's why I think he would almost have stood up and bowed when the banner went by, because the banner especially designed for this day bears those words from Scripture that motivated him to the very day that he breathed his last and that caused his lengthened shadow to be cast upon all of Christendom . . . . by faith alone . . . . .

> ....and then as he looks at the bulletin, bless his soul,
> ....and then as I loo
> he's pleased to discover that before the service is ended
>
> we will be singing another hymn that he wrote . . .

But from his vantage-point in Heaven he can sense what's coming next, and he's going to be a bit uncomfortable. For he has prior knowledge, you see, what you don't have, because of his vantage-point in Heaven. He knows the illustration that I'm going to use as I begin this sermon. He also knows, uncomfortably so, the text that I'm going to read, because it's not one of his favorites.

Well, here's the illustration. Maybe it came out in the New Yorker, I don't remember, but the cartoonist had sketched for us the newly-arrived within the Pearly Gates. He not only has a surprised look on his face, a pleasantly-surprised look, I dare say, but also now a curious look . . and how he says to the angel in charge, who is hovering over him, the newly-arrived-in-Heaven now says to the Angel-in-Charge hovering over him: "Tell me, if you don't mind, just what good deed in particular was it that I did that tilted the scales in my favor?"

> ...for you see, this is reminiscent to the kind of thing to which some of us continue to hold. It goes on from our impressionable days in childhood, when God was portrayed for us seated in Haaven above, or if not God, then St. Peter, with that great big book, we were told on a certain page was your name, my name, and then day by day the record was kept -- every good deed that we did was put down and every bad deed that we did was likewise recorded....and then when we came to the end of our life we'd be confronted by the record. And we either gained Heaven, or we were denied it, according to the record that we ourselves had written.

In much the same manner, in much the same spirit the newly-arrived-in-Heaven doesn't think about the correctness of his belief, he's not concerned with his creed, but he honestly believes that he gets to Heaven because somewhere along the line the scales were tilted in his favor because of something that he had done, either a grand slam, or one thing above all the others.

Well now Martin Luther, if he were here, he'd be squirming aplenty. In fact, it could well be that he'd be debating in his own mind as to whether he ought to stay until the sermon would be finished. And if that wouldn't be enough to jolt him, now I want to read to you the text, the 20th verse of the second chapter of the Epistle of James.

> ...now you Bible students, you know very well that Martin Luther had no time for that Epistle. He even branded it "An Epistle of straw" -- he could get along without it!

Here's the text: "Faith without works is dead."

Now even if you can't visualize Martin Luther being present now, about to get up and leave, I can visualize him turning in his grave and trying to struggle to his feet to shake a disapproving fist in my face. Now what I'm really doing after 458 years it doesn't take too much courage, but I'm taking Martin Luther on. I've studied his side of the story, I've listened to it - - and I believe it! And I come today to ask for equal time.

But let's give him credit. Let's understand why he felt the way he did and why he said, "By faith alone a man is saved." He gave us to understand, and properly so -- you hear me, don't you? -- "and properly so" -- that nothing that a man might do in itself would gain him entrance into Heaven, that you and I simply will never become good enough so that solely on our own merit the gates of Heaven will open automatically. Martin Luther was the product of his day, and rightly so. He grew up in a church that was telling people, the big thing is the records.....the big thing is not grace,

but merit.....you say so many prayers, you give so much money, you get credited to your account so many charitable deeds -- this is what matters most.

I tell you honestly, I get troubled sometimes when I go to a church that I love because I think it's the most majestic in all of Christendom -- and I've seen a number of cathedrals in my day -- St. Peter's in Rome. But despite its grandeur and the way it inspires and lifts the spirit, I remember how some of those stones went up, block upon block, because in the time of Martin Luther people were told that just because they gave to the building of St. Peter's, they could be assured of Heaven. They even had John Tetzel going around the country-side selling indulgences. They had a jingle:

> "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,
> The soul out of Purgatory's fire springs."

...and a drunk, lying in a gutter on a Saturday night, could feel somewhat secure - - he wouldn't have to go to Mass the next day, he wouldn't have to go to confession! -- because of something that he had done -- and here was a piece of paper to prove it.

So against that kind of thing, Martin Luther with all of his German stubbornness came down heavy and said, "This and this alone -- by faith a man is saved, by what he believes, not by the way he behaves necessarily."

Don't get me wrong, to the day I die I'll draw immeasurable comfort that Heaven will be mine because of what Jesus Christ has done. Nothing that You and I will ever hear will be more wonderful than that, and even as it was true for the dying thief, so it may be true for me: "Lord, save!" -- and in true faith as I call upon Him He will answer with redeeming love.

Sure, I remember what Martin Luther said, we'll never be good enough to get to Heaven . . . sure I remember the way it was put: no matter how nobly intentioned we may be, at best we offer Jesus Christ rotten wood

out of which to carve, and a lame horse to ride!

But now that I've reminded you again of Martin Luther's side of the story, let me tell you mine. It's never enough just to say you believe in Jesus Christ as long as you live on this earth, but as long as you live on this earth you've got to back up your belief with your behavior. For faith without works is useless, it's meaningless.

I used to think, honestly I did, that I'd like to be a traveling evangelist for my Lord. and I would know a measure of delight in going from place to place, surrounded with somebody like ours at the keyboard, and with a choir such as this, we'd set up a three-night stand here, we'd preach the Gospel for all we'd be worth -- give the altar call, and know the satisfaction of somebody coming up and giving his life to the Lord. It's a great thing, honestly it is, to see someone come and take this beginning step . . .

> . . . but then it occurred to me, there's something more to the Christian experience than the beginning step! There's always the kind of thing that you and I are up to every Lord's Day -- this nurturing of our faith, this receiving constant assurance that we're being empowered, this absolute necessity of getting marching orders as to what we're meant to do.

I have a quarrel with some folks who make much of the beginning step, and then walk away as though that was all that mattered. It is necessary that a man says he believes. It's equally important that he backs up his belief with his behavior. Creed is necessarily the cause for conduct.

When I was courting Winifred, a song in those days that was popular went something like this: "What Can I Say, Dear, After I Say I'm Sorry?" - - well honestly, for those of us who have taken that route, there isn't much that you can say. But there's a whole lot that you can do. And that's the

important thing. It's never enough just to come to Jesus Christ and ask Him to forgive you, which if your heart is right He most certainly will. But then something has to happen beyond that, and this is the other side of the story. Faith and action belong together.

George Butterick, one of the giants of the pulpit of the American scene, Pastor and preacher of Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church for a number of years, must have had the same jibes that I've experienced, because I sing his praise as I remind you now of something that he did. He had a very wealthy woman in his congregation who had become very crochety -- impatient with people, they got on her nerves. She almost became a disciple of Jean Paul Sarte who said: "Hell is other people. If they wouldn't be around it would be a heaven." Before she knew it she was treating them unkindly....

> ....well, God be praised, she had a conscience, and she knew that this did not become the Christian. And so she came to Dr. Butterick and she wanted to know if God could forgive her for being that kind of a person.
>
> ...well Dr. Butterick, bless his soul, did of course what any pastor would do -- he said, "Of course God will forgive you if you're truly sorry." So she confessed, and he gave her the assurance of forgiveness. But he didn't stop at that point! He gave her a jolt. He said, "Now that you're forgiven, I'm going to tell you something - - " . . . and he rose to his full authoritarian responsibility as a pastor and he said, "Now that you're forgiven, I want to tell you something. You get yourself down here to this church every Tuesday morning. Sure, I know you have a limousine, sure I know you have a chauffeur -- you have him bring you to this church every Tuesday morning, and then you come into the church office, and then you have the secre-

tary give you the names of our people who are sick or in the hospitals, and you go visit them.....and if at all possible, take flowers when you go to see them."

She listened. She obeyed.

When she died, they all referred to her as "The gracious little old lady with the flowers" . . .

But it all happened, you see, because Dr. Butterick had the good wisdom to put faith and action together. It would never have happened if he simply said, "God loves you, and you're forgiven."

But the God who loves us and the God who forgives us also gives us a measure of time. Why did He give us time? So that we might prove the integrity of our words. "What Can I Say, Dear, After I Say I'm Sorry?" - - - not much. But you can do an awful lot. That's what also matters.

Now that I've told you Martin Luther's side of the story a while ago, I hope I can hear him say across the centuries, "Well, it was alright. You said to Saint Luke congregation on Sunday morning, October 26, what had to be said." And this I believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
All Saints' Sunday November 2, 1975

"A CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF DEATH"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

It's a perfectly beautiful November morning, you know that very well. Let me suggest, however, that you shift your minds backward to the month of August, and visualize with me as best you can the week that some of us spent, the Saint Luke Week at Camp, Camp Nawakwa, in the South Mountains of Adams County near historic Gettysburg. We have been going there now for a number of years, as you know.

And one of the very fine things that our Director of Youth Ministry has decided would be continued as a tradition is the observance of Morning Watch. Now this may sound strange to some of you, and let me explain it immediately.

Morning Watch is that quarter-of-an-hour which is given to personal prayer and meditation as the day begins. Before anything else happens, that is even before we eat breakfast, every camper with his Bible in hand and the especially prepared devotional material, goes to his rock, or to his tree, to his special spot, and there for a quarter-of-an-hour, prays, reads the Bible, meditates.

It so happened that this past year one of the youngest members of the camp body -- not a camper as such because he was only in the third grade, a 9-year old camper because his family happened to be there -- thought he'd like to participate in Morning Watch too.

It was a bit strange to him, naturally it was, and so he asked if he could buddy-up with his grandfather . . . and so the two of them went, morning by morning, to their particular spot, and because he was able to read they

shared responsibility -- sometimes he would read from the Bible and then sometimes the grandfather would read the devotional material, or they would rotate.

Well I should also tell you that the material for this past summer for the Morning Watch was based upon the general theme that we live in God's home, that all of this created world belongs to God, and not only this world, but Heaven, too. God's home is in Heaven, and God's home is also here on earth. Now that was the theme.

But I should also tell you that on that one day, when they were dealing with this theme, the last paragraph dealt with a rhetorical question, and the grandfather read it -- with the grandson alongside of him now, get the picture -- the rhetorical question was, based on this general theme: "Are you ready to go to your Heavenly Home?".....and bless that 9-year-old, he blurted out spontaneously: "No! There are a lot of things I want to do. I'm not ready to go to my Heavenly Home."

Now I want to suggest to you that there are a lot of people who have never gotten beyond that stage. They cherish the thought that God gives us not only earth but Heaven too, but as far as Heaven is concerned, it can wait a while ....as far as dying is concerned, they're not at all pleased to think about it.

As I announce the text for today's sermon, on this All Saints' Sunday, I am fully aware of the fact that this sermon could have limited appeal, albeit, I'm warning you, a frank confession on my part -- I'd like to think of it as one of my better sermons - - - perhaps I ought to phrase it this way: one that's less poor. A great deal of my heart and soul has gone into the preparation of this sermon. And now the title: "A CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF DEATH." Now I want to be honest with you -- I know it has limited appeal, and I know some of you may be turning me off right now, because you're not at all inclined to

think about the fact of death. You'd like to ignore it, and you're numbered with any number of people that I know who would deny it if they could.

We Christians are a strange breed, honestly. One of the most wonderful things that we say that we have in our Christian faith is the hope of Heaven ....but not very many Christians want to die to get there! There's a text for today's sermon -- of course there is -- the words of our Blessed Lord that come from a passage of Scripture I dare say that I have read at every single funeral that I have ever conducted. I can think of no better time that those words could be read, except of course before death, that they might hold us in good stead and better prepare us to face the fact of death. Our Blessed Lord, anticipating the fact that His days on earth were limited, called together a bunch of precious people. They were His friends. And to help prepare them against the fact that one day He would no longer be with them, He spoke those words that have been recorded for us in the 14th chapter of John. Among all that He spoke, here is the word for today:

"Don't be troubled, and don't be afraid."

Now I'm suggesting to you that the Church needs to sit down and face with its people the fact of death. It's inevitable. None of us escapes it! You know, of course you do, that here in Saint Luke we concern ourselves with the common experiences in life. The Parish Deaconess sets up special conferences to deal with Baptism -- the high and holy regard we give when a child is born to this world, and the voice of the Church wants to be heard -- we have something to say about the birth of a child.....

> ....you know very well that Pastor David and I would never think of conducting a marriage ceremony without first scheduling an interview with the couple who plan to be married, because neither he nor I went into the

ministry just to marry people.....

We've gone into the ministry to introduce at all times the divine perspective, the Christian truth, and so as we talk with a couple about being married, we give them, to all intents and purposes, some measure of pre-marital counseling, really we do, because the Church does have something to say about the Christian home and the Christian family. But when it comes to this other aspect, which most certainly is a part of the common experiences of life -- death -- we haven't said too much.

And maybe you've conditioned us. I don't know what the response would be -- I'm inclined to thing it wouldn't be very great -- that if we set up a seminar on Death and Dying, it could have limited appeal. And yet even on a college campus now for some students it's become increasingly popular. But there is the child who said, indicating the reaction of many an adult -- I don't like the word. Can't we have some other word for it?" But whatever the word you may choose, it still represents the same fact, and it is inevitable.

I want always to be honest with you, in or out of the pulpit. I want you to know this regarding this sermon: I feel very comfortable preaching it. Not that I've lost my zest for living -- God forbid! I've never been more in love with life than now, and I savor each day and cherish each opportunity that God gives me day by day to do something for Him.....but there was a time in my life when I shied away thinking about death. Even in that small town in which I grew up, when the wreath was placed upon the door where the home had been visited by the Angel of Death, I'd tiptoe very gingerly past that house, with a measure of fear possessing my soul. And even to this day, when I look back and remember where the funeral home was in that small town as a kid, I'd always walk on the other side of the street! But this morning I come with a measure of courage, out of a sense of duty, to talk with you about the Christian view

of death. For several reasons, undoubtedly.

One, because the Christian Church has something to say about it.

And secondly, because so much of our thinking at times is far less than Christian when we think or deal with death.

Don't misunderstand me, I have my moments when I give our other Pastor here in Saint Luke Church high marks, just as I've dealt with any other pastor who has served on our staff. I gave him high marks not so long ago when he told me that he'd introduced into the Youth Ministry of Saint Luke Church a seminar on Death and Dying, and that twice within the past two years he took a group of young people into a funeral home, that they might bring a Christian perspective to even the kind of thing that happens there. The Christian Church does have something to say about it.

Now let's get back to those words of our Blessed Lord. First He says, "Don't be troubled by it." But we are. And just because we're human.

We're troubled by it because it can come so unexpectedly. May I tell you that as far as I am concerned -- and this may sound presumptuous to you -- I think I can almost handle anything if I have enough warning. With your help and with a bit of prayer I think I could devise a strategy. But death sometimes comes without warning, it comes so unexpectedly. And that troubles us. It could come as quickly as that!

And then because we've seen the way others have ended their earthly pilgrimage, it could be so <u>exacting</u>.....it could be so <u>tedious</u>, the deterioration that sets in until a person breathes his last frightens some of us -- if that should happen to us or someone that we love. So we're troubled by it.

We're troubled by it because basically death is a mystery. Honestly it is. Only Jesus Christ remains the authority on what happens on the <u>other</u> side,

and so we're mystified by it, and that troubles some of us.

But honestly now, just because it's a mystery, should it trouble us? Life is a mystery. Bless her soul, as she crossed the threshold -- I also greeted her this morning -- and in the brief conversation that we had, she said, "Remember me in your prayers -- the baby will be due in February"...the transmission of life through two people....how it happens. Sometimes we're mystified even though we know the act that causes it to occur. But to think that God would entrust two people with the glorious privilege of the transmission of life!

Love is a mystery. To think that two people should meet and they should feel toward each other as they would never again feel toward any other person! And to have something in their hearts that reflects as nothing else does the pure love of God for this world and the world yet to come. We don't shy away from these things. Yet we're inclined to shy away from death because it's a mystery. So we're troubled by it.

And you know what? We're also troubled by it because we refuse to allow ourselves to think in terms of our own death. We may feel comfortable thinking about the death of somebody else, but not my own.

> ...I smile broadly, as undoubtedly you will too, the cartoon that I saw of the man and woman up in years in their rockers, rocking away on the porch. They're reflecting, according to the cartoonist's instruction that he gives us, that now they've reached a certain stage in life where, as she says, more and more of their friends are disappearing from the scene, the circle gets smaller and smaller.....and she says to him, "And one of these days there's only going to be one of us left"....and he

says to her, "And when that happens, I'm moving to Arizona."

....it's always the other person, you see, it's not going to happen to me.

Says Jesus Christ, "Don't be troubled by it." But it's one thing to tell a person not to be troubled, it's another thing to be able to give him the reasons why he need not be troubled.

Jesus Christ said, "Don't be afraid of it." But we are afraid of it. When I was in school they told me there were two basic fears known to the mind of man -- instinctively he was afraid of a loud noise...instinctively he was afraid of falling. And I would add a third fear: he's afraid of dying, not only for himself but those whom he loves.

Don't get me wrong -- I'm every bit as human as you are, and I too would feel the ache, the pain, the sorrow and the enforced loneliness that you would feel. And I suppose we're also afraid because it's such a solitary experience. Each man must die by himself. And the facing of death also constitutes something of a solitary experience. I remember when our family circle was first broken by the Angel of Death hovering around us . . . one of your number wrote me a precious note and she said, as she ministered to my need, "There is no detour around sorrow." It did me good to realize that. And while I felt the ache and the pain then, surely I would feel it again whenever it happens, and undoubtedly more so next time, when it would come closer and closer and closer.

But we have to remember who we are. In Africa and Korea the missionaries tell us that the one thing that distinguishes the Christian from the pagan is the way they face death. Says Jesus Christ, "We're meant to face it triumphantly" . . . echoes the Apostle Paul, "Death is an enemy but it's the last enemy, and it is meant to be conquered." Says Jesus Christ, "Because I live you too shall live."

Did you ever hear of Charles Wertenbaker?/ He was a writer and editor of Time magazine. Let me tell you a bit about him.

He learned that the lump in his stomach was cancerous. What do you suppose he did in the face of that fact? When I tell you what his initial reaction was, you might say Bravo! For this was his initial reaction: he decided to swim out into the ocean near his home, to look back and to remember for the last time, and then to fill his lungs with water. The alternative, he said, was hospitals....pain....becoming a patient instead of a person....reduced to something less than a man who could swim out to meet his death. You might say Bravo!

But I'm happy to tell you he changed his mind. Having suffered little physical pain during his life, he felt it would be a cowardly thing to avoid it now. An exploratory operation revealed that he had only three months to live. Against the judgment of his doctors, Wertenbaker decided to go home to die. As the family faced the truth themselves, they also revealed it to many of their friends and neighbors. They renewed their relationships, and they paid their respects to the living before he died.....

> ....he talked with his wife, and they kept nothing back.
>
> ...his son, mind you, at that stage in his life, taught him how to play the guitar!

....he began to write a short book. The appreciation of daily experiences increased. There was as never before the sound of Bach...new appreciation for the taste of food....the feeling of the sand and the wind. He looked inward, he reviewed and evaluated himself in his relations with others....he looked outward, and he looked upward.....

.....Near the end, glad he had not taken his swim into the ocean, he wrote, "Why, I would have drowned the best part of my life."

It's possible for the Christian to face it triumphantly. Jesus Christ makes that resource available to us. It isn't if a man dies.....and it may not be so much when a man dies....as to how a man dies. Jesus Christ says, "Don't be troubled by it, and don't be afraid."

Do you remember that play that's titled, "The Dark At The Top of The Stairs"? - - the couple talk to their little boy and say, "Why are you afraid of the dark at the top of the stairs?" He answers as only a little boy would answer, "Because I don't know what's up there, and I'm afraid to go alone."

...the mother, every bit a mother, takes a hand, and she says, "We'll go up to it together."

For every one of us there's always the dark at the top of the stairs. Call it death if you want to. And hear the words of Jesus Christ, who says, "I'll go with you. I will never leave you. I will not forsake you."

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Stewardship Sunday November 9, 1975

"A MATTER OF RECORD"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The front page of the current issue of Saint Luke MESSENGER carried the introductory words for today's sermon. It did not, however, give you the title for today's sermon, nor did it give you the text. Let me give you the title now. Today's sermon bears the title: "WHEN IT BECOMES A MATTER OF RECORD" . . . and the text, the second verse of Psalm 107:

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so"

Now these introductory words to this sermon as they appeared on the front cover of the current issue of this week's MESSENGER:

> "I would not go . . . I would not do it! How could I?' So he answered the question that someone in our group had asked him. He answered us by putting a question to us in turn: a rather clever thing to do, of course. But he was being more honest than clever, and that is the point that we dare not miss in the recollection of that Sunday night conversation of a week ago that is now about to be shared with all of you . . . "

Well, you're entitled to a bit of background. You ought to know something about this man with a determined voice.

He is a pastor. He is the son of a pastor. He is married to the daughter of a pastor. He had come to our shores from Germany, where he serves a congregation in Hamburg. Ruth and Al Storslee and Selmer and Dorothy Norland in our behalf very graciously served as their hosts.

As they were about to conclude their visit before their return to Germany, it was possible for some of us to gather together informally in Bieber Hall to share with them our common concern for the work of Jesus

Christ and His Holy Church. We talked about how it's being done over there, we talked about how it's being done here. We were especially interested because you know the report comes to us that Europeans don't take the church as seriously as we do here in the States. In the Scandinavian areas they may take pride in the fact that in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland, that 90% of the people are Lutheran, because Lutheran is the so-called "State Church." And yet I remember my first visit to Sweden, the university town of Lund in southern Sweden - - at that time the population of about 20,000. There was that beautiful majestic church of St. Lawrence, the oldest church in northern Europe, to which some 20,000 people supposedly would gravitate.....yet I remember my friend, one of the pastors, telling me that less than 200 might be there on a given Sunday. So it was against that kind of background, you see, that our conversation continued.

And then a small number of us tarried a bit and before we knew it we were at the parsonage, and in that circle of conversation more questions were asked. And one was raised especially about the integrity of church membership in his congregation. And from that we went on to talk about the way he ministered to the people, the kind of pastoral concern he had for them. And bless his soul, every bit a man of God, he said, "I visit....I perform weddings....I conduct funerals -- for those who are members it's no problem." But then very earnestly he said, "For those who are not members, here we have a problem."

We had a troubled look on our faces, and then he said, "Let me explain." And as he continued he told us about somebody asking him to conduct a funeral for a man. The man had lived alone, and when he was discovered dead in his apartment the neighbor came to this pastor and said, "Would you conduct Christian burial for him?"

We waited for the answer. We thought most certainly he would say, "Why

of course I will!" - - because you happen to have two pastors serving you who are cut from the same cloth, and neither of us has ever refused, in the time of need, to provide a pastoral ministry as God gives us strength. But lo and behold, this pastor said, when he was asked to conduct Christian burial for this man who had died, he said: "I would not go - - how could I? I said No."

Still seeing the troubled look on our faces, he said, "Let me explain. In our congregation any number of people get their name on the church roll as children when they are baptized, and a high percentage of people still are baptized as children. But there does come a time when -- as a matter of record -- a man has to sign a card indicating whether he still wants to stick with the church. As a matter of record, he has to sign indicating his desire to support the church, indicating his earnest willingness to see the work of the Lord advanced. When he signs that card it becomes a matter of record that he supports the work, and wants to see the Church of Jesus Christ go forward. When he refuses to sign, this too becomes a matter of record! -- that he does not want to support the church and has no desire to see it advanced. I happen to know that this man, when he was given the chance to sign, refused to sign."

> ...with all due credit to our visitor from overseas, he was a man of God, with a finely-honed conscience. For him it was basically a matter of integrity -- how then could he go and conduct Christian burial for a man who, as a matter of record, had indicated no interest in the work of the Lord?

We have been brought up short by that. It's caused a great deal of sober reflection. The text for today's sermon: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so - - ".....if you know what God has done for you, as one who has drawn full benefit from the gracious deed which Jesus Christ has accomplished in our

behalf -- since we are given the assurance that we are being saved, that before each of us there is the prospect of Heaven . . . since we are being shown that we don't have to go to Hell, that we can live the life of the redeemed, and because you're being saved here and now - - - then let the redeemed say so! Let them make it a matter of record!

This God of ours is always giving us time. This God of ours is always giving us opportunity by which to make things a matter of record, when He endowed us with the freedom of will. What is this but the God-given opportunity to make things a matter of record!

When we deal with those precious young people who come to us for Confirmation, at the beginning of the year, I surprise them, I suppose, when I say, "You don't have to be confirmed. There are a lot of people who will live and die and never be confirmed in the Christian faith. You are not being forced into it. But now that you're in this class, if you want to be confirmed come Pentecost, you will be confirmed because you want to be confirmed -- because you will make it a matter of record!

By deliberate design we've altered the Confirmation Service here in Saint Luke Church so that when a youngster is confirmed, he walks right up to the altar, and the Pastor puts the question to him specifically and directly: "Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and do you want to serve Him through His Holy Church?" . . . and then in advance we tell them at that point everybody is going to be quiet -- you've heard me tell you this before, you who are present now, you've heard me tell you this -- at that point everyone's quiet. It isn't the voice of the Pastor that's going to be heard....it isn't the voice of the father or the mother, nobly intentioned as they may be, and caught up in this significant moment, that's going to be heard. I say to the confirmand: "It's your voice that's going to be heard -- you are

the one who makes it a matter of record.

> ...on Saturday of this week, sure, we have reason to believe that they are by love possessed -- they know that already -- but at one o'clock, here before the altar, a man and a woman will stand and in the presence of other people will pledge devotion and make it a matter of record, so that there should be no question about it.....

In so many ways God is always giving us a chance to make it a matter of record.

When Bryce and Mary Redington first came into this area they lived in an apartment house, and I can remember conversations with them, for about that time a study was being made that some 60% of all the people who moved into the metropolitan area chose to live in apartment houses. And that same study also revealed that only about 4 % of the people who lived in apartment houses became active with a church or a synagogue. Bryce and Mary used to tell me that when they got up to come to church they felt as though they were the only ones out there in the parking lot.....but even as they drove away, if anyone should see them, it became a matter of record. And when they would return, if anyone would engage them in conversation, it became a matter of record.

> ....some of you walked here to church this morning. Would you be willing to believe that even as you walked it became a matter of record, because there were people who saw in what direction you were going....
>
> ....recognize it for what it's worth -- these people who stop here for the traffic light, at the intersection of Colesville Road and Dale Drive - - there are those who take a glance in this direction and they do take note of the fact that you're heading for these doors - - it does become a matter of record....

God is always giving us opportunity to establish the record.

Why do I preach this sermon to you on this day in particular? Because tomorrow or during the week you'll be getting a communication from Saint Luke Church. You'll get a little folder like this -- it will only take you about two minutes to read it, maybe. It bears the title, "A Matter of Record". I don't mind telling you, I addressed an envelope on Friday and sent one of these to my friend, Dr. Albert Stauderman, the Editor of The LUTHERAN. He's been here to Saint Luke Church, and in the little note that I wrote him I said, "Dear Al, as one pastor in a particular place to another who is fortunate enough to serve as the Pastor of the Church at large, I thought you'd be interested in this single promotional piece by which we address the congregation in behalf of the 1976 budget that could be somewhere between $375,000 and $400,000. I thought you'd be interested in this, a single promotional piece." And I know very well when I next see Dr. Stauderman, he'll shake his head and say, "How can it be done? -- no direct visitation....no assigning of quotas! " and I'll say to him in your behalf, it's the integrity of the people of Saint Luke Church who make it a matter of record as to how they feel about the Lord's work, when they sign it becomes the evidence of their concern.

Why shouldn't I tell you these things? I've already spoken with six people who are planning to be part of the next New Members' Group. How many more there will be we never know until the group is formed. One of them engaged me in personal conversation. He had only worshipped here once. And then he came and he said, even before the class was formed -- "Send me a pledge card" -- and I presume he tithes.....and then he did something that nobody else has ever done before, and I don't encourage it - - as a matter of record, he said, "You can count on me for $42.00 a week" - - - he isn't even a member! But as a matter of record he's seeing what you, the people of Saint Luke Church, are up to -- he's caught your spirit! He knows how we have a concern for the work of the Lord Jesus Christ at home and abroad. He wants to be part of it because

of the record which you've already written. You can put it that way.

Mr. Cofield, a delightful person, our chief custodian, is a Deacon in the Upper Room Baptist Church over on Minnesota Avenue in the District of Columbia. Some of us have gone over there. On occasion I have been able to preach from their pulpit. They've shown us around, and with pride they indicate the waiting room where the new convert stands and then disrobes and gets ready to put on the baptismal gown before he goes down into the baptistry . . .

> ...with a twinkle in his eye Mr. Cofield once told me about a candidate for baptism who went down into the baptistry with the preacher, and the preacher was about to reach for him, and he slipped away -- not into the water, but he went back up the steps. And the preacher was unnerved, of course he was -- was he losing a candidate so soon? -- and as he grabbed him, graciously I hope, he said, "Where are you going?" and he said, "I forgot something." And Mr. Cofield said the preacher said, "What did you forget?" He said, "I forgot my wallet!" And the preacher said, "Don't be troubled. It will be safe where it is, it will be all right -- nobody will take it." And the candidate for baptism said, "That isn't the point. When I get baptized I want my pocketbook baptized too - - " . . . . as a <u>matter of record!</u>

In the new marriage service that Pastor David and I have given our blessing to in Saint Luke Church, there's a new wording that we've introduced. When the ring is slipped on the finger, among other words these words are spoken: " - and with all that I am and all that I have, I honor you in the name of God" - - it becomes a matter of record. God is always giving us this chance to make things a matter of record.

In these delightful sessions to which I've already alluded, we've had these days of the past week in Bieber Hall, Pastor David and I agreed that this year it would be different. Heretofore, he and I, we were the ones responsible for

the feature presentation. But we surprised the people who came for the most part, and we said, "This year you make the presentation".....and as a feature of the evening, as the folks were seated around the tables, we asked them to engage themselves in conversation dealing with the provocative question: What difference would it make in your life, if Saint Luke Church went out of existence a week from today?" While it may be hypothetical for us, the fact does remain that within the last ten years two sister Lutheran congregations in Washington did disband and go out of existence.....

> ....we were deeply gratified by the testimony that was given by those who spoke. Occasionally we had a surprise participant, the last person to speak. And that person didn't know who he or she would be until the person was announced.....

I made bold to ask, in a surprise fashion, a young mother who has been part of our life throughout her formative years to go to the microphone. She did. She was nervous, as you might suppose. And when she walked away she walked away in much the same fashion as I have when I've come from the pulpit sometimes and wished that I could have said it better - - I had my chance, but I could have done better. Well, that's the way she felt when she went home, and so on Wednesday night she left here around 9:30 -- listen to this . . .

> "Dear Pastor, it's 11:00 o'clock. We just got home from the Fellowship Supper after picking up Laurie and DJ at my parents' house. I just said to Doug that I always wished for an opportunity to tell a large group of people what Saint Luke has meant to me. I got that chance tonight and what did I do? I shook.
>
> Doug suggested that I write an open letter to the congregation, but I said No to that. And yet I've always intended to write a letter to you, Pastor, to tell you how much growing up in Saint Luke has meant to me . . "

(I hope you won't make light of it, but I try to control my emotions, but when I first read this letter I was moved to tears -- maybe you'll understand why)

" . . . I've always intended to write a letter to you, Pastor, to tell you how much growing up in Saint Luke has meant to me. I feel so very fortunate that I had the opportunity to grow up in Saint Luke. You know, all my closest friends were the kids at church, and most of my spare time was spent doing things in Saint Luke. There were the Confirmation classes, choir practice, Luther League and Big Thursday . . "

(that was the name for the mid-week gathering in her day for teenagers)

" . . and those nice Wednesday morning Bible classes during Lent . . "

(we had them, you know, breakfast sessions and Bible study before the kids went off to school during the Lenten season)

" . . . I have so many joyful and deeply moving memories of those years and the people I knew then.....I recall the Variety Shows, especially the year we went to the Luther League of America Convention in Illinois -- the congregation was so generous in their support. I remember Annie writing us a special note with her contribution...I remember every minute of the trip. Then there were those times at Mar-Lu-Ridge --(that's the week we spent at camp, up in the mountains) -- that you made so special. I got such a warm feeling when you mentioned Morning Watch in your sermon last Sunday. I cherish my choir years. I remember one beautiful Christmas Eve and the choir was waiting to enter the candle-lit Nave. We looked out the Red Doors to see the quiet snow starting to fall . . we were to sing "In The Bleak Midwinter" and the snow made it all the more beautiful ...

...and I can't leave out again our Confirmation classes and Big Thursday -- the Prayer Book we received when we were confirmed has been so valuable to me. I carried it with me on my wedding day and it has helped us through some rough times. It's a beautiful

" . . little book.

I must confess that when we moved to Reston, Doug and I looked for a church closer to home so we could be more active, but none could match the reverence we feel in Saint Luke . . . "

Now let me stop there for a minute -- we can well afford to take the time. As a teenager she was impressed by the reverence - - you see, you made it a matter of record, just by your demeanor when you came to God's House . .

" . . but none could match the reverence we feel in Saint Luke. We didn't want Laurie to go to just any Sunday School. We wanted her to start out with that feeling one gets when you walk into Saint Luke, that you're in God's House. One church we went to for a while was O.K., but Laurie screamed every time she arrived at the Sunday School room. The first time we brought her to Saint Luke she loved it -- the staff was so warm to her. That's the main reason we've come back. I know what an influence the church can have on a child and Doug and I realize this. We want Saint Luke's influence in the name of Jesus Christ on our precious Laurie . . . "

...and then she goes on with some exceedingly personal things, equally precious, that I shan't read. But this is her concluding paragraph:

" . . . Well these are some of my many thoughts I wanted to share with you. I've wanted to write this letter for a number of years. It's my "Pages in a Diary."

So, bless her soul, she's made it a matter of record.

You won't forget, will you, that when we come back next Lord's Day, we'll be bringing our signed pledge cards -- a matter of record. And if I know anything at all about the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He's vitally interested in the record that we will give Him to keep. In the final analysis, a great deal depends upon it. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Pentecost 26 - 8:30 a.m. service November 16, 1975

- ON BAPTISM -

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I covet for you the privilege that I enjoy Sunday by Sunday when I stand at this desk, to be able to look into your faces. I wish that all of you could see what I see. And especially so this morning. For as precious as anything to be seen anywhere is the sight to my left: the family pew, the mother holding a baby in her arms. In all Christendom, in the field of art, there is no picture more frequently portrayed, aside from that of our Blessed Lord himself, than that of the Madonna and Child -- the Holy Mother and the Christ Child. We do well to remember that.

And I bring this to your attention immediately now because very shortly that child will be taken into the arms of a pastor and that child will be named for Jesus Christ.

A number of weeks ago, with a ring in his voice he simply said, "Susie had the baby - - can we make arrangements for the baptism?" This hour on this day was set. And so I've set aside the sermon that I had planned to preach to talk to you particularly about the Sacrament of Baptism. It's most appropriate that that should happen now.

Let me remind you first of all of what a Sacrament is. As the classic expression is: It's a visible sign of an invisible grace - - something that we see indicating something that's taking place that we can't see. It is an allowance that's made because we are human. Down deep inside of us God is always at work and we need to dramatize it, we need to picture it. Down deep inside of us God is always visiting us, with His grace and with His favor, and human as we are, we set aside certain times when we say, "This is happen-

ing, now!"

Use the word properly, don't be afraid of it -- dramatize -- spelling out -- making it visible. We do it all the time. And because we're human that's the only way sometimes we understand it. As an example, a man and a woman are in love. They decide to spend the rest of their years together. They want each other to know that the love that now possesses them is a love that's going to go on. It isn't just for six months, as they understand it and as they want it . . . it isn't just for six years. But now that they are in love they can't think of ever being apart from each other. They want to live out the rest of their years together.

And occasionally in that pre-marital session that I have when they come to be married, and I put the first question to them: Why do you want to be married? - - - every now and then the answer comes -- and would you believe it, it's spoken by him, he says, "I can't think of living without her."

> ....and I say before she speaks, "I wouldn't want to marry the two of you if you could think of living apart. If you're giving me to understand that you're meant for each other and you want to spend the rest of your life together, then the Christian Church has something to say to you . . . "

....well, the marriage service is conducted, you know, and there's a particular moment in the marriage service when he reaches for a ring. Now pay attention -- it's a ring. It's not something he puts around her neck. It's not a pin he affixes to her dress. It's a ring that goes around the finger. He's dramatizing something, he's spelling it out. He's drawing a picture of it. This love is to go on. There's no end to a circle, you see. There's no ending to a ring. Human as we are, we do this sort of thing.

Now, very shortly, this hand of mine will reach into a bowl of water -- regular water, plain ordinary tap water. It's not unusual, there's nothing magical about it. And then as I hold this baby in the crook of my arm I will speak certain words -- I'll be dramatizing something -- I'll be spelling it out -- I'll be drawing a picture in front of you.

Water is a cleansing agent. Did you ever try to wash your face without water? Did you ever even try to brush your teeth with simply tooth paste and without water? From the very beginning man has always looked upon water as a cleansing agent. So the Church very properly through the Sacrament of Baptism reaches for water to symbolize the fact that this child is being cleansed from sin.

But you say to yourself very quickly -- only a child....can a child sin? But the Church believes in the doctrine of original sin, that from the very beginning there is this inclination toward evil, there is this desire that develops within us to act contrary to the mind of God. Any man who has lived any significant time knows very well that there is always this desire to do something that's contrary to God, and we have it from the very beginning. So in God's sight sin is sin, so God says to this child, "Now, from this moment, I'm claiming you -- I am claiming you!"....and sin becomes conquered.

We learn a great deal from the way other Christian groups practice their faith. Do you know that at one time in the Greek Orthodox Church, when a child was presented for baptism, as the child was handed to the priest and the child was delivered safely into the arms of the priest, the father or the mother would turn aside and spit away from the child -- spelling out, symbolic of the fact that they were now spitting upon the Devil, that no longer would evil be able to possess the soul of this child because now this child

was placed safely into the arms of the Church, and that God would always watch over this child, that God would have a continuing concern for this child.

You may say to me very quickly, but God has a concern for this child even before the child's been baptized! God has a concern for this child from the very moment of conception. God was at work in the lives of the two people who become the parents of this child! Of course you're right. But human as we are, we need our moments when we spell this out, when we make it, if you please, a matter of record, when the thing is established in our sight and in the presence of other people as well.

There are those who say that in and through baptism the child becomes part of the Family of God. This is true. But even before the act of baptism God is conscious of this child. God is concerned for this child. But in and through the Sacrament of Baptism we give the child a Christian name, the child is named for Jesus Christ! Not simply the name of the family into which it was born, but now into the greater family which is the Family of God. We spell this out. We dramatize it. This is no longer our child. We ought never to think of this child as ours alone. Leslie Weatherhead, the great British preacher, used to say, "A child is a bit of two people, plus God" ...and in baptism the God-factor is forever being introduced. In baptism we remind ourselves that in God's sight we're all children. In baptism we remind ourselves that as long as we live we have a Heavenly Father who cares for us, who has a concern for us.

I am fully aware of the fact that if someone walked in from the street who had no sensitivity for the Christian religion, who had allowed himself to be separated from the truth of God, this is a meaningless act! He'd have no appreciation for it. But these are things that have meaning for those who are inside the Family of God, for those of us who know themselves to be His children. We wait, as the child is named for Jesus Christ.

I've told some of you that in years gone by Winifred and I used to go up to Princeton, when the Presbyterian Church would sponsor a convocation during the summer weeks. Occasionally we'd sit under those beautiful elm trees and Harris Kirk, at that time the distinguished preacher of Franklin Street Presbyterian Church in Baltimore, would speak to us informally. He told us one time about growing up in the deep South. He had a colored mammy who would put him to bed in the trundle bed at night. And when she tucked him in, in her dialect which I shan't attempt, she would say to him, "Harris, I've got to be good to you.....Harris, I've got to watch over you....Harris, I have to take real good care of you. You're God's child, you have been baptized."

I say to you with all the strength that my soul can command. what a difference it would make in the homes of our land, where Christ's influence could be at work, if night after night when a child is tucked away into his bed, that the father or the mother, the brother or the sister, or the grandmother, the grandfather, leaning over that child, could say, "I've got to take good care of you. You're something special! You're precious! You have been baptized - - you're God's child!" This is what's happening in the Sacrament of Baptism -- we're spelling it out: God's child.

When I began my ministry I visited in a home and found that they had a young Timothy. And naturally, as you would think that I would, I spoke to them about the possibility of baptism. And the father shook his head: No. He wasn't interested in baptism. He'd done a great deal of reading, he'd moved around in different parts of the world, he had some notions that were a little bit strange to the conventional Christian . . he wasn't going to have his child baptized.

And then I said, "Would you allow me to come back some evening and we'll just talk about this in a quiet relaxed way?" He was kind enough to allow me

to do that. And as we talked one evening, it seemed as though no progress was being made because -- I must now remind you that this meditation has a text, you'll recognize the words: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God".....it seemed as though we weren't making much progress in our conversation. And then I said to him, "What now do you really want most for this child of yours, your first-born?" And realistically he answered, he wanted to be able to provide the child with food, clothing and shelter, and because they were interested in education, he said, "I've taken out a policy so that when the youngster gets ready for college, I'll have the necessary funds. And then he mentioned a number of other things that he said he wanted very much for that child.

And then I looked him straight in the eye and I said, "Did it ever occur to you, because you do have some spiritual sensitivity, that the most wonderful thing in the world that you could ever give to this child is the introduction to the fact of God, and to do it at the earliest possible age?" And we went on from that point. And he made the decision then that the child would be baptized -- because that's exactly what happens in baptism: the precious truth of God is being established, and becomes, if I may say it again, a matter of record.

May I tell you this, that some time ago there was a son who for some reason that seemed very important to him ran away from home. The father and the mother were totally unprepared for the experience. One day went on after another. The father particularly almost went out of his mind. And then one day he went to a Communion rail where he and the boy had received Communion not long after he had been confirmed. And there he knelt in his private devotions, and a measure of peace came to his soul because he prayed something like this: "God, he's been baptized -- he's Your child. Wherever he is, watch over him. You promised to do it. You promised that no evil would come to him!" Then he walked away. And that man said that prayer was answered. We spell it out when a child is baptized -- he's God's child! Let's baptize the child now, the child of James and Susan Kerns . . .

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost November 16, 1975

"IN THE HERE AND IN THE NOW"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

A clever chap in Brooklyn, the owner and operator of an automobile repair shop, some time ago took an old car, in fact he took two old cars, same model, same type, and put them together, and then made one car with the two of them. Which simply meant that the car that he fashioned out of the two old cars now had two fronts, two motors and two steering wheels. It could be driven both ways. When it's standing still no one knows in which direction it's headed.

I know some people like that. They'd like to have it both ways. They'd likd to be able to move at will backward or forward. Each generation, I suppose, has its mood. I'm wondering now if we're coming into a generation that's going to make much of nostalgia, that looks back to other days and honestly believes that they were the good old days. Is that one reason why folks are wearing granny glasses and wearing granny dresses? Can you justify the interest in antiques on that score? Is this a reason why when some people decorate their homes they bring an interior decorator and ask that the introduction of a Gay 90's motif be had. Or could it be that in our day and in our age we're so disappointed, we're so disillusioned, that we keep talking about the good old days, and psychologically we're always heading backward, thinking that was the better age in which to live?

Well, there are people like that, who want to go back. But as I come to this sacred desk this morning, I tell you that it doesn't become the Christian to live in the past. Christians were never meant to simply look backward and want to live in the past. Christians were meant to have a high regard for the

past, of course they were. But at the same time they must constantly remind themselves that there is a future, and that they are being drawn by the future.

Now all of this leads me to introduce to you the text for today's sermon. But before I do that I want to tell you why it claims my soul. Every now and then when I read the Bible, I read it these days as though I had never read it before. It's a very salutary thing to do, because when you have been reading the Bible for a number of decades, some of its truths, so pregnant with meaning, can become a bit dull because you've read them before. It's only when you come at it in a pristine sort of way that the words become as sharp as they were meant to be.

Now I should also tell you this before I read the text -- not wanting to hold you in suspence, of course not -- but I'm numbered with a number of you who on occasion suffer from despair, disappointment and disillusionment -- honestly I am. I have my moments when I have leaned very heavily upon someone, only to discover that all that I had hoped for just didn't pan out in that individual, and I have been disappointed.

I've had my moments when I've faced things idealistically, and then only to discover that disillusionment sets in. And the net result is one hour after another, or sometimes -- ask Winifred -- maybe a day or two of desperation and despair. It doesn't happen very often, but when it does, it takes its toll. And then I bring myself up short and reqlize that it doesn't become the Christian. And that's why I began to leap for joy when I discovered this text now that I'll read for you.

It was written by a man named John, who wrote three Letters. This is in the First Letter of the three that he wrote. It's in the 3rd chapter, it's verses 3 and 4: 1 Jn. 3. 2

> "Here and now," says John, "dear friends, we are God's children. What we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him. . . ."

Well that's done something for me - - "Here and now"! -- we're God's children. "Here and now" -- we can claim a Father's blessing. "Here and now" -- we can begin to practice all that we ought to practice in His name.

One of the things I've discovered in my relationships with people is that they either think in the past -- that those were the days when one could really be a Christian.....that those were the days when one could be a giant in the faith -- you had a climate going for you, you had a life-style that was conducive for you - - - those were the halcyon days.

> ...or on the other hand I discovered that people make the mistake of thinking that only in some future day will be the possibility to practice the Christian faith.

Well, I'm not forgetting we ought to be drawn by the future, and I honestly believe that with God the best is always yet to come. I believe that.

Why do I believe it? Because the past has proven it. The future may be different from the past, but as far as God's concerned, He's fashioning the future. He's always creating it, He's developing it! For shame upon us -- honestly, for shame upon us, when we're inclined to think that God's great acts were always the acts that happened in the past.

There are some people who allow themselves to believe that God in other years did what He did and then He closed the book, and He said, "That's it!" Why, even when I was in college I knew that was a lie. They told me, and there were those who said God is like a watch-maker - - with that master-mind of His He designs the watch, He puts its parts together, He winds the watch, puts it on a shelf and then walks away.....sees the job's done, that's all there is to it - - - "I'm quitting!" Why even then, at nineteen years of age, I knew

that wasn't true about God, that God never called it a day's work and quits and walks away, as though everything is finished now. He who created is creating! His process is always going on. For shame upon us when we imprison Him in the past. With God we're always being drawn toward some better brighter day. Granted we have our health and strength, it's always going to be there.

Quite parenthetically I say to you, don't be afraid of growing older. Some people are afraid of it. Some people want so much to stay young -- young in spirit, that's one thing, but to close the chapter and to think that no good thing lies ahead - - - we don't have a God like that! With God, there's always going to be good that's lying ahead!

You've heard it frequently, of course you have, the tourist who came to Washington....the cabbie gets him as a fare. They take the high spots - - do they go by the National Archives building?...and there he reads the words:

THE PAST IS PROLOGUE

....and he says to the cabbie -- (they're meant to be authorities on almost anything, you know) -- "What does that mean?" And that cabbie was equal to it. He said, "It simply means, Man, you ain't seen nothing yet!" And maybe that's the way it is with God and us: we haven't seen it all.

And with God, He exercises a kind of economy. He doesn't want anything to be wasted, and He's always fashioning out of the past some better think for today and for tomorrow. I honestly believe that.

But on the other hand -- let me say it again -- there are some people who put off being good today because they say, "I will wait until tomorrow. It will be better then." Well, that's what thrills me about this text. John says, with a broad smile upon his face, "Realize it! Think of it! It's abso-

lutely amazing! Here and now -- today - - - not tomorrow, and it wasn't just for yesterday's children - - - here and now we can be God's children!"

There are some of us who thank God for Saint Luke Church. Let me say it to you, will you -- there are some of us who thank God for Saint Luke Church because we've found within this congregation people who honestly believe that it's possible to fashion this congregation after the kind of church that Jesus Christ has in mind. And that's why they love us as much as they do, and that's why they care for us as much as they do -- right now! They're not saying, Wait until we grow older.....they're not saying, Wait until the situation changes and then we might be able to practice what God wants a church to be. But there are those of you who are saying: Right now let's be the kind of a church that Jesus Christ wants a congregation to be -- in the here and the now.

It is possible to begin today to be the kind of person that God wants you to be -- honestly! Do you mind my telling you this - she told it to me herself - - the example is, a woman who was troubled with a smoking habit, and she talked a great deal about quitting....and then one day she said, "Today, I'm going to quit!" And she did. She didn't wait until a year from now or six months from now. And when you visit her in her home she'll point with pride to $169.00 worth of curtains - - - it came out of Thelma's envelope. For every time she was going to go and buy a pack of cigarettes, she put that money in the envelope. Now she's amazed at what's happened to her, and she'll tell you herself: "Why didn't I do it earlier!" . . . the here and the now -- it's possible to begin - today.

I had an old friend who used to tell me this story. He'd delight in repeating it and I find myself also delighting in repeating it. Maybe I've told it to you before.....the chap who was driving down a country road and he came to an old codger and he said, "How do I get to such-and-such a place?" And the old-timer proceeded to give him directions, and he said, "Well you go down

here about three miles, you come to a covered bridge, you turn to the left, and you go for a mile-and-a-half, you come to an old oak tree, then you turn to the right and you go for another half-mile and you come to a school house . . "

> ...and then he stopped abruptly, and he said, "You know, if I were you and I wanted to get there, I wouldn't start from here."

...but he happened to be where he was, you see, and the place happened to be where it was. And if he wanted to get there he had to begin from where he was. So it is with the practice of the Christian religion. One can begin where he is, and if one can't begin to be a Christian where he is, chances are he can't begin to be a Christian anywhere else!

I am happy occasionally when I hear people saying, "It was heavenly." What do they mean when they say that? They mean that right now -- today -- they experience something that resembles Heaven. It's possible. So John says to those Christians in his day who suffered a measure of despair: "Let's get it straight - - in the here and now, today, we are God's children. We can live the way He wants us to live. It isn't something that begins then and there, after we die. It can begin, as the title for this sermon would have it: "In The Here and In The Now."

And then there's something else to this text that you ought not to ignore. He says, "We don't know exactly what the future may be like . . " Well, none of us knows what the future may have in hand, but as Christians we know in whose hand the future is held. And that's something to ponder.

And then there's something else that comes to us from this text, as you continue to read. He says: "We shall be like him." Do you know that the more we associate with certain people, the more we resemble them by their behavior pattern? Do you know that I can honestly tell you that since I have been with you for almost two decades, I can easily distinguish sometimes that the youngster

comes from a certain home because he has the facial characteristics, if not the pattern of behavior, of his parents whom I know? It does happen.

Now apply that to our Christian experience. The more we practice the Christian behavior, the more we try to live like Jesus Christ now, says John, the properly so, when He appears we'll discover that our image is a reflection of His image.....

> ...older people sometimes take out the family album, and all of a sudden they discover how much they look like their ancestors.....

I'm happy to tell you that there are some of you who have the manner of Jesus Christ -- not something reserved for you until later on. The storehouse of halos that Jesus Christ keeps He has ready for distribution -- today. Not just after you go through Heaven's gates. It can happen now. This is one of the truths about the Christian religion -- extraordinary things can happen to ordinary people - - plain ordinary people such as we are. We can begin now to live as the children of God.

But I know what happens when darkness settles in, we're afraid to do it. Is it Don Quixote himself, or is it his friend, who in the darkness of the night hangs from the ledge of a window the greater part of the night, only to discover when morning comes that he's an inch away from the floor! Beloved, I say to you, sometimes you're only an inch away from the firm foundation which is Jesus Christ. Let yourself go! Now! And trust Him.....and discover the glow which God wants to give you -- not ten years from now, but <u>today.</u>

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Christ The King Sunday November 23, 1975

"HOW IT'S GOING TO END"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

When we first moved into our little place amid the hills of home it was little more than a shell. We had decided to build it as a kind of a retreat, and yet at the same time a long-term investment, that come retirement years, years of active retirement, it could still serve as a base of operation.

We broke ground, I think it was in May, and we decided to live in it come July. As you might readily understand, surmise, it was somewhat unfinished. We had curtains where the doors were on the inside....when we went to enter the house we had to cross by plank above a bed where one day the porch would be. So we lived in it. And then we set for ourselves a kind of a schedule where each year we'd have a project, until some day it might be finally completed.

We discovered, however, that occasionally we might have as a visitor or as a guest a master carpenter, and as he'd look around invariably he would pose a question -- a very significant question: Just how do you plan to finish this house?.....for him it wasn't a question of when but how do you plan to finish it?

You see, with his eye he could see some things that otherwise we might not have paid attention to these matters. As an example, it would make a difference as to the width of the door jamb, because ultimately would we simply have painted cinder-block on the inside? - - or would we simply put a skim coat of plaster on the cinder-block....or would we put up firring strips and then plaster-board and then paint or paper or panel?.....all of these things, you see, were important to the eye of the master-carpenter, who when he looked at the house kept thinking in terms of the way it would look in the final analysis.

Because we didn't always keep this in mind, even though we had a certain objec-

tive, some mistakes have been made, and we have had to live with these mistakes in the interim. Perhaps we can correct them before the final touch is given.

Why do I begin this sermon on this Christ The King Sunday in this way?

Well, before I give you the answer let me also tell you, if a man is going to accept an assignment to write a biography, Joseph Woods says he ought not to begin at the beginning of a man's life. He ought not to first concern himself with the circumstances of the man's birth, as to where he was born and under what conditions. But if he wants to write significantly about a man's life, he ought to begin with the way it ends! He ought to work from the back, then toward the beginning. That's what Joseph Woods says. Well I'm about to suggest to you that nothing can ever really be appreciated until it's seen in its totality, or, if you please, the way it might end ultimately.

Now these thoughts are being triggered on this Christ The King Sunday by the Gospel Lesson that was read. I don't know how closely you paid attention to that Gospel Lesson. It's one of the great chapters in the New Testament, and Matthew was bringing out all the changes and ringing all the bells when he came to that 25th chapter of the book he was writing.

With a sanctified imagination I try to think of how it was in the day of Matthew -- he was one of the disciples, you know. He never forgot it. Wherever he went he did a great deal of talking about Jesus Christ, his Lord and his Saviour. But a strange thing happened when he talked about Jesus Christ, and even when he came to write his book -- you may not be aware of this -- he didn't spend much time upon the early life of Christ. In fact, in all of the Gospels -- not all of the writers deal with the birth of Christ in any way at all. At least one of them omits it completely! Matthew gives passing reference to it, but he spends most of his time in his book, and I presume in his conversation, talking about the final three years in the life of Christ. And when it came to the Gospel according to Matthew -- would you believe this! -- almost one-quarter, I think I can say this,

of the Gospel according to Matthew deals with but one week, the last week, in the life of our Blessed Lord.

Because when people would talk to Matthew about Jesus, they might say to him, This Jesus that you tell us about -- do you think He'll come again? And then Matthew's face would light up, almost like the bulbs on a Christmas tree, he'd become effusive and he'd become brilliant - - - "Come again? Of course He's going to come again!"

> ....and then the fellow may say to Matthew, "Well, when do you think he's going to come?"

And Matthew in all honesty would say, "I don't know. He - - he never told us exactly when. Some of us used to press Him on this question and ask Him when it would be, and all we could get from Him was that it was going to come unexpectedly. He even used a figure of speech, as I remember, something about 'as a thief comes in the night' - - you never know when he might strike. When is He going to come? I don't know. But how is He going to come?"- - - ah, then Matthew became ecstatic, and he used that marvelous figure of speech by which Dr. Hesse introduced the Gospel Lesson for today - - - he says, says Matthew: "He's going to come as a King in glory! He's going to be surrounded with a retinue of angels."

This was in the Gospel Lesson today. It was just read a little while ago -- something as marvelous as all that! When is He going to come? Don't know. How is He going to come? I'll tell you: as a King in glory, with a retinue of angels. And He's going to be seated on a throne. And it's going to be Judgment Day.

Well, what do you catch from that? Well to begin with, you can say to yourself, and quickly so, why that's the way it's going to end! That's the way this whole thing is going to wind up -- not as the cynic says, with a whimper, but for the Christian perspective it's going to end with a bang! -- triumphantly -- majestically - - - gloriously! This God of ours, this Jesus Christ, isn't the defeated one. He's going to come back triumphantly. And Matthew kept telling people all about the way the thing was going to end.

That's why I come to this sacred desk this morning, to remind you, my friend, that you and I must keep saying to ourselves, this is the way it's really going to end. We have our moments, of course we do, when we suffer despair and disillusionment and we feel defeated. Why you even heard me say it from this desk -- I get a strange kind of reaction sometimes when I go back and read some of the things that I said -- honestly I do! And once some time ago I told you from this desk that I honestly believed that the world was headed toward hell faster than it was headed toward heaven. I was brooding that day.

But when I brooded I keep saying to myself I brooded as an optimist. That may be the pace now at which the world happens to be moving.....but on the other hand, I know that God never intended the world to go to hell -- everybody. God is the Redeemer, the one who comes to rescue and to save, to establish His Kingdom. Why even long before Jesus Christ appeared on the scene, there was a prophet by the name of Ezekiel -- that was the first Lesson that was read today -- in which it was being declared that no matter how wicked the world was, God would hever wash His hands of it completely, God will come back even if He has to come back Himself and wind the thing up and set it straight - -

"Behold, I, even I, says the Lord of hosts, I will come . . . "

....that's the way Ezekiel put it.

So I come to this sacred desk this morning, on this Christ the King Sunday, to remind you that that's the title that belongs to him - - he comes as king, with His Kingdom that He's going to establish, and it's going to end that way.... ....not with a whimper -- don't believe the cynic. It's going to end with a bang! This is the kind of a Lord we have. This is the kind of a God who claims us. This is the God who says, "You don't have to go to hell, I won't let you go to hell. I'll come and establish my Kingdom in your midst."

With all the inconvenience that we had in that little place amid the hills of home, summer after summer, it was like watching the calendar -- always by the

15th of October -- (it was a miserable job, really it was) -- there was a tiny bit of a crawl hole that we had in the boys' bedroom, and I'd lift up that space just enough to allow me to go down through it, get into the crawl space underneath the house, drain the water, dip the water out in a dipper -- messy, cold, chilly . . . we went through it, fall after fall, inconvenienced as we were, because we kept thinking of the way it was going to end! It gave us courage. We endured it, because we never lost sight of the way it was going to end. And that, I suggest to you, is the kind of thing that you and I must have in mind in this world which smacks of so much of imperfection and so much wickedness - - the way it's meant to end by the triumphant touch of God himself.

This can do two things for us, I think. It can give us an indomitable faith, as long as we think that the ultimate purposes of God will prevail, as long as we can believe that God will always have the last word - - don't ever forget it! And that enables us to go on in the meantime living triumphantly -- enduring what has to be endured.

Incidentally, let me tell you this: did you ever stop to think why, in days gone by, in the time of the ancients, parents chose names for their children very carefully? They didn't choose them recklessly or casually. When a mother named her daughter Karen, she named her daughter Karen because she knew the name meant pure, and she honestly hoped and believed that as that daughter would grow and develop, she would eventually become that kind of person....

> .....when a mother or a father named their son Richard, was it not simply to imply that as that young man grew and developed he might grow into the kind of character that was lionhearted and courageous? ...and he might never forget what he was meant to be, how the thing was going to end? And in the meantime then, you see,

you can endure a lot, as long as you never lose sight of the ultimate objective. When you see it in its totality, you have courage to go on, when you know it's going to end triumphantly.

That's why some people, not all of them - - that's why some people when they're told they have something that's incurable, do something more than face it in stock fashion. By the grace of God they know they can endure it because ultimately there's going to be a time that's free from pain and disease, and that even the suffering is a part of the total plan.

The second thing that I can tell you is this: that when you think in terms of the totality, the little almost insignificant deeds of love and compassion take in a whole new dimension. In this chapter that was read for you today as the 25th chapter of Matthew, it begins with: "Then shall come the King in his glory . . . ".....and he talks about Judgment, and then what does the chapter deal with? - - Jesus is talking about, as Matthew remembers, a man who was in prison, and somebody went to visit him.....a man who was sick and somebody went to call on him.....a person who was ill-clad, and somebody took him some clothing. Jesus says, "These are the things that are important in the meanwhile -- busy yourself doing these things"-- it's within the grasp of everyone. Anyone can qualify for the final Judgment.

> ....you don't have to be a preacher, you don't have to have so-called distinguished talents. Anyone -- everyone is capable of visiting the sick...sharing clothing....being concerned about the imprisoned.....

I know what you're thinking. In a world that smacks of as much wickedness as ours, we're prone to despair and say, what's the good of it? There's a novel, isn't there, called "Stowaway" - - and in that novel there's a character

by the name of O'Hara. The chap is at sea, and God bless him, he's possessed by a noble impulse, and all of a sudden he decides that whatever remains of his life, he's going to make the most of it, then and there! He tells this to a buddy of his, and his buddy ridicules him - - "What's the use of being good? What's the use of being kind?" O'Hara says to his buddy, "Sure, I may be surrounded by all of this, but I know one thing - - as long as I live, no matter where I am, the world is going to get the best of me. I'm going to give it all that I have. I don't know for how long, but as long as I'm around it's going to get the best."

Well, you can afford to talk like that when you know that in the hand of God nothing is ever lost, and in the final analysis, Love triumphs, for the King in His glory who returns is the King of Love.

....this I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Communion Meditation - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The First Sunday in Advent November 30, 1975

"IF IT'S TUESDAY IT MUST BE BELGIUM"

. . . when I began my ministry I had the good fortune to take several package tours to Europe, several as the group leader. One of the things I early discovered was this, that people would get most out of the tour if maybe day by day you sat them down, and then said to them, "This is where we have been -- did you really see what we were supposed to have seen?"

Once we had a group of twenty-one, and it was exceedingly interesting to discover what some people saw that other people did not see, and also, of course, as you might surmise, what some people saw with greater intensity, other people saw in a very casual way.

I suggest to you that life is like a journey. It's not exactly a package tour, because each of us does not travel in the same way. Hopefully we all have the same ultimate destination, but the itinerary could vary from person to person. But as I come to this sacred desk this morning, I ask you, did it ever occur to you that one can view our coming together on a Sunday morning as a group of fellow pilgrims along life's way, who sit down and reflect upon the distance we've already covered, upon the journey that's yet to unfold. And maybe one of the responsibilities that rests upon the man who stands at the pulpit is to be a kind of interpreter, a kind of evaluator of what we've experienced thus far, and to give you some taste, by the grace of God, as to what it is that lies ahead ere we come to journey's end.

I once knew a pastor who said that he discovered a whole new world of relationship with his people when on occasion he'd have opportunito to engage them in in-depth conversation, he'd surprise them by saying: "What new things did you see today? - - What new discovery did you make?" God is always surrounding us with beautiful and lovely and grand and good things....."Earth

crowned with heaven, and every common bush afire with God;

But only the man who sees takes off his shoes

and worships . . . the rest,"

said the poet,

" . . . sit around and eat blackberries."

As you journey through life, what new discovery have you made? What new thing have you seen?

I keep asking God to keep me mentally alert and physically strong, and to grant me the gift of a few more years. I do not consider myself old, but I'd like to live a longer period of time, if only for the simple reason, to discover anew some of the exceedingly precious things that God has put in this world round about us. As some of you know, as often as we can -- not really as frequently as we'd like, we head for the hills of home, 200 miles due north from here, in north central Pennsylvania. And when I made that trip this past summer -- would you believe me when I tell you this -- that I discovered something that was always there, but I discovered them all over again -- tiger lilies by the side of the road. They'd be by the old canal branch, they'd be in almost unexpected places, a cluster here and a cluster there, adding a gracious touch. For twenty years now I have been making that trip from Silver Spring to Williamsport, Pennsylvania. They have been there all those years. But it was only this summer that I discovered them all over again.

You recognize the moral in this story, don't you? So many things God has placed before us and around us -- so frequently we miss them. Wouldn't it be a thing of judgment if in the moment of death Christ gave us an instant replay of all the places where we had been throughout our years, of all the things He'd surrounded us with, and then through His eyes we could see what we didn't see, and all the things that we missed. For the moment I can't think of any

arrangement of judgment as frightening as that.

The old Jewish rabbi used to have a saying that in the time of judgment, the eternal God would hold us responsible for every joy that we denied ourselves, that we passed by, that we failed to appreciate.

There's a text for today's meditation, it's from the Gospel according to John, the first chapter, the 26th verse:

"There stands one among you whom you do not know . . . "

....a free translation would be: "You are missing someone who is very near you." That person was Jesus Christ, and He was there, and God put Him down right in the midst of those people. There's a lamentable thing that comes out of the Old Testament, the lament is this: "Is it nothing to you, all ye who pass by?" God performing for us the redemptive deed, and people pass by and never see it. Don't allow yourself to be numbered with those who at the time of the birth of Jesus Christ never knew He was there, never saw Him.

Life is a journey, and I suggest to you that in God's routing of your life, all roads lead to Bethlehem, and at one time or another you'll find yourself in Bethlehem, spiritually speaking. But not like Herod the King, but not like the inn-keeper, but not like the mass given to frivolities. I'm glad we observe Advent. Advent gives us four weeks in which to do our spiritual thinking early, in which to make ready for Him, to make certain that we don't miss Him.

Each new day is a gift from God, another chance to see some new thing, or to re-discover something old. As the spiritual bishop and shepherd of your souls, let's take the road that leads to Bethlehem.....and as your spiritual tour director, let me tell you in advance - - look for Him! Don't miss Him!

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SIGNS OF HOPE"
(Isaiah 1:9)

O GOD, we have so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the preaching of Your Word. That we should make the most of it, give us now the blessing of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

My heart goes out constantly to the artist, be he a painter, a writer, a singer, or a dramatic performer, who is forever at the mercy of his critics. Critics, you know, can master such cutting rematks that become wellnigh ruinous. How long do you think a play on Broadway, reviewed in this manner, would last - - for this is the way the critic appraised it, I'll give you only his opening sentence: "I viewed it from a disadvantageous position: I was facing the stage."

I suggest to you as I come to this sacred desk this morning that there are some people who look that way upon life, which is the drama-of-all-dramas. Inescapably they have to face it. And as one act unfolds after another, they have little reason to believe that it could improve. They brand it a rather hopeless situation.

Occasionally when I have devotions in the Chapel of the Grateful Heart during the week I find myself coming perhaps fresh from having made hospital calls or visiting with somebody who's just gotten a report from a surgeon or a physician, and I have been given to understand that the outlook is not very promising. And then I find myself offering a prayer such as this, and the words do not come easily to my lips because they rest heavily upon my heart: "O God, strengthen those whose physical condition will continue to deteriorate."

It was a long-distance call that I received from the Secretary of the Office of the President of the Lutheran Church in America. I was privileged

to be among those who knew him not only as the President and the Bishop of the Church but also as a friend. Back in 1968 Dr. Franklin Clark Fry was scheduled to come to Saint Luke Church to conduct an Ordination Service for two of our ministerial sons. Graciously he had consented to come, but little did he realize that God would have other plans for him. For about ten days -- I think that was the time, before he was to have been here, he was stricken ill. And when his Secretary talked with me from the New York office, while I could not see the tears in her face I could feel them in her heart. She simply said, "The outlook is not good." And a whole brand new chapter in history for the Lutheran Church in America began to be written from that very point.

But I'm also concerned this morning not only by physical deterioration -- I'm also concerned with spiritual deterioration, emotional deterioration, psychological deterioration, where things get, for want of a better term, progressively worse.

You know by this time that frequently when I come to this sacred desk I share with you my lament for the kind of a world in which we happen to live. But having reached the point in life that I have, I label myself - - (man can afford to do that after several decades have run their course) - - and quite realistically I call myself one who does brood. But then I happen to remember that I am also a Christian, so I've become a "brooding optimist."

I look back upon the past and I realize that we build the future and we fashion the present with the past. And the immediate past hasn't been too salutary. We really don't have much of an exemplary record. Small wonder, then, that I should brood as I think of the world in which Lester Olinger's grandsons will grow up.

But if one is to be a Christian he has to be very careful how he uses that word hopeless in his vocabulary. The title for today's sermon is "Signs of Hope." Relax, my friend, a bit. It's meant to be an encouragement.....and the text is from the prophecy of Isaiah, the 9th verse of the very first chapter.

Isaiah was a prophet who lived centuries before the day of Jesus Christ, and you've got to remember now that prophets were a peculiar breed of people. They rejoiced when people grieved....and they grieved when people rejoiced! They had a way of looking for the eternal dimension, and their judgments quite frequently were counter to what were being offered.

It was not a very happy day in the life of Israel, the nation to whom Isaiah was related. In fact they had come upon very difficult time. The Assyrians had done them in! They suffered from assault from without, and because they had forgotten the covenant of the Lord, they suffered from deterioration within. In the dark and dismal day Isaiah stands up and says, "If the Lord of Hosts had not left us a remnant, we should soon have been like Sodom and no better than Gomorrah." . . . bad as the situation is, says Isaiah, there's still cause for hope, for God has left us with a remnant.

I smile broadly to myself, as undoubtedly you would have done yesterday ....I went shopping early in the morning and got there before the shopkeeper arrived, and so I stayed in the car waiting until he would come. And then, lo and behold, someone drove in ahead of me and parked in the space beyond me. I suppose if I were to have dubbed the vehicle, I would have had a name for it -- "Hardly Able'.....for it just hardly was able to make the spot. It was a dilapidated old station wagon, that's what it was, and I thought to myself, using farmer's language, "You look as though you'd been held together by a binder's twine. And then my eye fell upon a bumper sticker, on the back door of the station wagon, and I could hardly believe my eyes - - "GOD'S IN CONTROL OF EVERYTHING." And my first reaction was, evidently God hadn't done a very good job on that station wagon!

And quickly I regained my senses, and I said, bless that chap's soul! He has indominantable courage, because as miserable as his plight is, he must have some reason to believe that God's going to get him out of it.

I suggest to you that maybe life is like a dilapidated old station wagon. And as we think about it, maybe we won't quite get the next mile down the road, but we have reason to believe that come wind or weather, God has a way of saving the day, and saving us. And Advent, my friend, is the season of hope. And in Advent we anticipate. We anticipate God breaking through -- God invading the world - - - God making His personal appearance. That's what a Christian dare never forget. God's always looking for some kind of a handle.....God's always looking for one person, perhaps, who might hold in his hand a candle. God always has a remnant with which He can begin. This is what it is for the Christian to read history - - God has never allowed Himself to be without witness. God has been able to deal with any situation creatively. This is what you and I have to remember!

I'm ashamed of myself when I read too much the report of the economist, when I read too much and too long the report of the political scientist. You see, they have a way of explaining the phenomena of our day. And if I don't exercise some caution when I read their analyses, I level for a flat view of history, and I can become distraught, and disappointed, and disillusioned, and suffer nothing bus despair. But as a Christian, when I read history through the corrective lenses of God, I find rays of hope.

Back in 1969 There was a Conference on Liturgics that was conducted in the city of Milwaukee. Now what in the world are liturgics? You know what liturgics are -- it is, what shall I say, the finest of the worship order -- people study about the kind of worship experience we ought to allow people to become engaged in....the hymns we sing, the Scripture we read, the anthems we write and choose. Well would you believe it, this conference on liturgics said if we're to put the eternal finger upon the pulsebeat of man, we ought to do something noble. And lo and behold, for their agenda one afternoon they had no committee reports, there were no papers read, but rather they turned loose

all 200 delegates into the streets of Milwaukee and said, "You walk the streets of Milwaukee now for two hours, and then you come back and bring to us whatever signs of hope you've encountered in the people that you've met or the situations you've experienced."

> .....if I were to turn you loose for a week in the area in which you either live or work, and asked you to look for signs of hope, would you really come back with some kind of a formidable report, or would your page be blank?

We have our moments when we're inclined to think that we might come back with a blank page.

Yet when you and I come back to this place Sunday after Sunday we're constrained to deal with rays of hope, and that's why I'm happy to tell you, when you anticipate Christmas story, think of the signs of hope that loom on the horizon. It was a wicked world in which Jesus was born, make no mistake about it.....

> ....and yet God was able to put His finger upon a bunch of shepherds -- not very many! -- a handful, and they responded to the vision. They happened to believe that He was up to something, and they tried to find out what it was...that's hopeful! -- when God can find some people, limited in number, who are still trying to find out what He's up to....
>
> ....God looked for a woman, pure, chaste -- let me use the word: He looked for a virgin. And He found one. Do I have to say it -- that's hopeful. And God's still finding them! They're still around. Presumably that age had its infidelity.
>
> ....God tried to find a man who would be faithful to a woman. He found one! His name was Joseph. That's hopeful! There are men like that still around, and there are children who can still grow up as Jesus did in that home in Nazareth, surrounded with love and

affection and whose parents set before them good and holy examples.....not as many as we'd like -- surely not as many as we'd like! But they're still around. That's hopeful.

And the thing that pleases me most is this - - I could walk the aisle of this place right now and look any of you straight in the eye, and I could say to you, I dare say, "You give the rest of us cause for hope, because God has a handle on you.....He's working in you and through you."

.....we hadn't better forget it.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday in Advent December 14, 1975

"RETURN ENGAGEMENT"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

It could happen this year, you know. It's been some time since we have been snow-bound for a day or so, and if it should happen, what will you do when you're confined within your own home -- you can't get to your meeting, you can't get to the place where you ought to be at work?

....well maybe you'll play some of the recordings that you have been wanting to play for a long time and never got around to it.....

....or maybe you might wish to reach for a book -- you have wanted to read it, you know. It could be the night when you could get your way through the greater part of it....

How it may be with you I don't know, but for myself I'm inclined to think that if such luxury could occur of having such time available, I'd like to re-catalogue some of the transparencies that I've taken across the years. There they are, tucked away. I haven't looked at them for some time, but I'd like to go through them again, with Winifred's help, and put them in categories, and I'd have one category called: "GREAT PERSONALITIES" - -

- - I did have the good fortune to get a good photograph of King Hussein of Jordan...

- - there's another one, I think it turned out quite well, of Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia....

--- not quite as good, there's one of King Mahendra, of that tiny kingdom of Nepal, north of India, seated upon an elephant on a festive occasion.....

- - I cherish the one of Bishop Ordass of Hungary, of Bishop Hans Lilja, of Martin Niemoller.....

But I won't be satisfied until I can put my fingers on the one of the man with the shaggy white hair, the turtleneck sweater, the baggy trousers, the sandled feet - - Albert Einstein. I got a good photograph at some distance when he was walking across the campus at Princeton, heading for his modest clapboard house. I particularly want that one because not long after I took it I remember reading about him.

He had been in attendance at a rather significant meeting - - I can't think of any meeting that he would attend that wouldn't be significant. The presiding officer exploited the occasion, and having spotted Albert Einstein in the audience he said something to this effect: "I'm delighted to be able to announce to you that the distinguished professor, Dr. Einstein, is with us. Dr. Einstein, I'm wondering if you would be willing to come to the podium and say a few words?" There was an awkward pause. With seeming reluctance he stood, moved slowly to the podium, surveyed the audience, and then to the surprise and surely to the chagrin of the presiding officer, he said, "I really don't have anything to say. But maybe if you'd invite me to come back again some other time, I might be able to make a few remarks then."

Unlike Albert Einstein, there was an itinerant carpenter's son, a couple of thousand years ago, who went hither and yon just because He had something to say. And He would say what He wanted to say, whether He was invited or not. He exploited in the name of God every opportunity, and He <u>made</u> the opportunity if it wasn't extended to Him. He made a pulpit out of a boat....He made a pulpit out of a hilltop....He made a pulpit as He sat by the side of a well and talked with a distraught woman. He was forever talking, giving people unforgettable pictures of God, proclaiming the truth of God's love and mercy. But at 33 years of age they cut Him down, they silenced Him, they said, "We've had enough of

this - - We'll hear you no longer." But God be praised, just because He happens to be God, this itinerant preacher who always had something to say so perfectly and completely said, "I'm scheduling for myself a return engagement - - I'm going to come back!"

I want to talk to you this morning about this return engagement. In fact, that's the title for today's sermon, the Third Sunday in Advent. Basically what I'm going to say, to share with you now has to do with the Second Coming. The text of course, from the Book of the Revelation, the last chapter, maybe the last verse. John the mystic, confined to the Isle of Patmos, is carried away as he gets one revelation after another, and this one crowns them all. He hears Jesus Christ saying to him, "I am coming soon".....and John responds and says, "Come, Lord Jesus."

What do you know about the Second Coming?

Maybe not very much! And maybe that's why I have to hurry on immediately to tell you maybe that's one reason why you may not think very much about it. There are a lot of people, you see, who shy away from thinking about the Second Coming. We just don't know too much about it. And just interestingly enough, Jesus Christ kept talking about the fact that He was going to have a return engagement - - He would come back. But human as we are, we shy away from things that are a little bit indefinite. You see, we don't know exactly <u>when</u>. And most of us would like to know the precise time.

It's also a bit vague because we don't know <u>how</u> He's going to come back. We have all kinds of imagery - - we have a number of different ways of trying to picture it. But specifically, we don't know how He's going to come back, and we don't know when.

Some folks get some fancy notions, they get carried away with it. Not very many, but some do. Didn't I read about ten days ago that there was a bunch of Christians gathered themselves together at a particular place. They had marked the calendar with a big X....they were watching the clock. They had

it all figured out - - at a precise time and a particular place He was going to come again. But He didn't. They were left there, in their idleness. He didn't show up. But according to their time-table, He was supposed to. So some of us shy away from this whole business of thinking about the Second Coming because Christ did say, you know, that not even the angels in Heaven are privy to the information as to when the return engagement takes place.

Well maybe that's one reason why you haven't done much thinking about the Second Coming - - you like to think precisely, you like to think specifically, and when it comes to the Second Coming, you're a bit stimied.

I'd like to suggest another reason why some of us don't much think about the Second Coming. We're uncomfortable because we're afraid. Nobody likes to be caught off-guard, and nobody in the time of Judgment -- use the phrase -- cherishes the thought of being found wanting. Why I should say to you quite parenthetically, I have been annoyed sometimes when some of you good Lutherans come to me and say, "Pastor, do we Lutherans believe in the Second Coming?" Why of course we believe in the Second Coming! - - and every time we come together to worship we stand on our feet and we recite the Creed in which we say "He will come again".....and we Lutherans are numbered among those who make much of our tradition. We have the Church Year, and we take four particular Sundays, we call them Advent. And you know, of course, the word comes from the Latin which means coming - - in which we strike the theme, in our music, in our prayers, in our Scripture, in our sermons - - He is coming again.

But we don't do as much real honest-to-goodness thinking about it as we should, because some of us become a bit uncomfortable and we shy away from the concept that when He comes again He's going to judge us.

Of course we remember, when we were kids growing up - - wasn't that one of the basic pictures they gave us of God? - - with that great big book in front of Him, keeping the score.....one section of the book divided into the

good things that we did.....the other part of the book devoted to the bad things that we did? And if that concept should linger in the recesses of our minds, we're uncomfortable at the thought of Judgment because some of us have lived long enough to know that no matter how nobly intentioned we are, we never come off quite as good as we'd like to do. The record leaves a lot to be desired.

And then we have to be honest with ourselves, some of us know full well that even some of the good that we do, no matter how impressive the record, it's done from selfish reasons. We enjoy it so much. And we enjoy the recognition that comes from being classified as a "good"person. Well, we shy away from it because in our sober moments we can be a guilt-ridden lot.

George Buttrick used to tell about the man who was away from home some time on business. And while he was in the big city, he committed, as it's very easy to commit, an act or two of indiscretion. Whatever the sin, well he had done it. The time came for him to head back home. And each step that he took toward the train, and each minute that he spent on that train, as he was heading home, caused him a great deal of vexation, and he was uneasy and uncomfortable.

> .....about 20 miles from home the conductor came on the coach where he was and announced his name. There was somebody aboard the train now who was looking for him.....

The guilt was heavy to bear, and he almost panicked, and particularly so when the conductor said, "Your wife got on this train at the last station." And then the conductor went on to say, "Your wife and your son have missed you so much, they thought they'd surprise you, and out of sheer love they've gotten aboard the train to welcome you home, and to ride with you the remaining 20 miles." .....Someone was coming to meet him - - out of sheer love. And the anticipation now was almost destroyed because he was guilt-ridden.

Someone who loves us is coming our way. God's Son is returning. He's heading in our direction, just because He loves us. He knows we're guilt-ridden,

He knows we haven't behaved the way we should have behaved. But that isn't going to stop Him from coming. There's a three-word definition for God - - don't ever forget it: God is love.....and love can never be separated from the one whom he loves.

...And if I didn't believe in a Second Coming for any other reason, I'd be willing to believe in it for that.....

....now you think about that for a little while. And I'm convinced that the quality of our life in the present moment is determined by what we anticipate tomorrow.....

.....Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

* * *

(Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Fourth Sunday in Advent December 21, 1975

"A DIET FOR THE SOUL"
(Proverbs 15:17)

(introductory sentences not on tape)

. . . cook book. As a matter of in-house information, you may be interested in knowing that when Thoma Petersen and Mildred Whiting first came to me to discuss the idea of a cook book in Saint Luke Church, I naturally gave it my support. But when they came to me and told me that they were planning to place an initial order for a thousand copies, I dampened their enthusiasm. I said, you'd better think in terms of hundreds -- several hundreds, in fact, until the people get a chance to see it. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that they could now go into their fourth printing! So I say to Thoma and to Mildred, they can better trust my preaching from the Gospel than advice given to them on the marketing of cook books.

And I suppose that any number of you will be reaching for that cook book as you anticipate the Christmas festivities. The cook book here at Saint Luke will be getting its first try-out over the Christmas holiday in a very real way, and you will be thumbing its pages and become excited about this recipe or that recipe, particularly so because it's Christmas. I don't know of any meal in the course of the year that engenders quite as much excitement as the Christmas dinner.

You will be making all kind of preparation for it, and well you should. And I suppose the more affluent we become, and the more sophisticated, the better we want our food prepared. And in all likelihood, with the touch of the gourmet. There will be no end to the preparation that we will be making for the meals that we will be serving.

Now the title for today's sermon: "A Diet For The Soul." The text - -

well before I read it for you I'd better tell you that it's tucked away in that interesting book in the Old Testament of pithy sayings -- you're right, it's the Book of Proverbs. How long has it been since you've turned to it? ....and like as not when I announce the text, some of you may be hearing it for the very first time. I won't read it for you in the old translation -- it's far more understandable and makes its impact immediately as you hear it the way the recent translators have put it. Well, this is the way the 17th verse of the 15th chapter of the Book of Proverbs reads:

> "It is better to eat vegetables with people you love than to eat the finest meat where there is hate."

Why, do you suppose, I'm prompted to speak to you on this text today? As you anticipate the Christmas dinner some of you will be inviting people that you haven't invited at other times of the year. Let me speak quite frankly now -- and every bit the human being that I am and quite realistically -- you've put off inviting some people, perhaps, in the course of the year, just because you can't tolerate them otherwise. But Christmas comes but once a year, so in the spirit of Christmas you'll do it.....

...the person whose raucous laughter just irritates you, but because you feel obligated you'll invite them....

...the folks who have the unruly children -- how you wish you could discipline them, and they'll try your patience -- but it's Christmas, you'll invite them.....

...the chap who when he sits down, wherever he may be, begins to pontificate...and otherwise you can't tolerate that kind of person, but it's Christmas -- you'll invite that person to your dinner.....

...or take the person who seems to be a self-appointed chairman at all meetings that he happens to attend, and while you wouldn't

care to tolerate him otherwise, you will because it's Christmas. Is that a real reading of life? Maybe it doesn't apply in your case. But I can think of some cases to which it would apply, and as one who has come from a rather large family, I know something of the tensions that can arise when you sit down to break bread with people that more or less you find yourself tolerating.

He was a wise man who said to me some years ago: "It isn't so much the food that you eat -- it's the people with whom you eat it, and the kind of spirit that prevails while you break bread together." So I'm suggesting that you give a due and proper heed to the diet of the soul, the kind of good will and precious fellowship you'll engender as you break bread together -- far more important than the food that we eat is the conversation we share and the fellowship that we engender. This I most certainly believe.

Significantly enough, one of the things I did last evening as I put the final touches to this sermon was to reach for the cook book. And I thumbed its pages and I found a lot of interesting information in it that some of you may have yet to discover. Would you believe it that there is a page in this book, and I predict perhaps the least-read of all the pages in the book-- somebody inserted, where to find certain Scripture passages -- food for the soul, you see.

Then as I went through the book I came upon a most interesting recipe. I was intrigued by the title -- Nancy Hay submitted it. It's called Scripture Cake....and then down on the left-hand side it lists all the ingredients that you'll reach for in the pantry in order to make that cake...and then on the opposite side it gives a list of all the Scriptural passages related to those ingredients. And I'm willing to suggest that while most housewives will read the list of ingredients, I'm not so sure that they'll spend equal time on the

Scripture passages.

I'm inclined to say to you that P. T. Barnum, bless his soul, once said that he'd give a thousand dollars to the preacher whose pants were first worn out in the knees. Maybe somebody might offer a housewife in Saint Luke a thousand dollars whose Bible is worn out before her cook book. What I'm trying to say to you in a very practical way is this: we ought not to forget that there is such a thing as the diet of the soul. And we'll spend all kinds of time and a considerable amount of money getting the necessary ingredients by which to spread the table....but will we spend equal time, or a generous portion of time, to think in terms of what's going to happen when we sit down to eat?

The people who live in the Middle East, God bless them, have always made much of the breaking of bread. To all intents and purposes maybe that's where it originated, for they honestly believed that when you sat down to break bread with somebody, your soul was fed and nurtured and that was something far more important than simply physical nourishment.

Far more important than the food that you eat is the conversation that you share.... Far more important than the table that you spread is the fellowship that you engender. So I rise on this Sunday next before Christmas, when we're getting ready for the most festive of all means that we'll eat in the course of the year, to ask the question: will you take earnestly the preparation of the type of thing that's going to happen at your dinner table -- as earnestly as you take time to set it?

I've noticed Winifred on occasion, the pride that she takes in getting the cloth on the table without a wrinkle -- it has to rest on that table precisely, not a 32nd of an inch longer on one side than on the other. And then the silver, and the china, and the napkins -- the time that's spent even in setting the table - - - the time that's spent even in making the decision as

to what you will serve -- the time that is spent, and properly so, in the necessary purchasing of the ingredients . . . the time that is spent in actually preparing the meal. But again I say with all the strength that I can command, let's remember that time should also be spent getting ready for the kind of conversation we're going to share, and the fellowship that will be engendered.

Every preacher does his share of pipe-dreaming, of course he does. I don't mind telling you one of mine: I wish I had an independent income so that I could live in a house that had a dining room that could seat twenty people, and every Sunday night I'd love to invite members of the congregation in until we exhausted the roll, if it took us four years. (Relax, Winifred, if I had an independent income we could hire a maid!) But how our lives would be enriched, those of us who live in the parsonage, by the thing that you would bring to us, the insights that we would have on certain problems -- what we could learn as we would sense the spiritual pulsebeat as you would discuss things with us that really matter most. There is no substitute for this kind of thing.

Now I'm suggesting to you that you give equal time to the concern for what's going to happen at the dinner table as well as you're going to give to what is put on it. Now going back to the Cook Book - - you're going to be fascinated by some of the recipes, and because you're daring, because you like to experiment, you're going to try some of them. And it could be that as you go throughout the Cook Book you're recognize someone's name, and because you happen to know that person, you'll be all the more interested in trying that recipe, because of the respect that you have for that person. This I believe.

Now all of this leads me to say to you, for heaven's sake, why don't you concern yourself with that diet for the soul and do a little experimenting there. Take the prophets of old -- take the writers of the Psalms -- take

some of the writings of the Apostle Paul.....take some of the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ.....

-- recognize them for what they're worth

-- try some of their preaching

-- examine some of their platitudes

-- put a high value upon some of their gems of thought....

Try them. Just as you'll try some recipes for the first time and discover that it's to your liking, you will go back to it again and ever so often -- it could be that way with spiritual truths. Try a little bit of love when you sit down to eat -- God's kind of love, that is. Look upon the person who sits at that table with you as a person, with fears, and hopes, and heart-throbs, just as you. Simply don't settle for passing the food, but recognize him for what he is. Try a little patience -- a little bit moreso than usual. Anticipate the fact that come the Christmas dinner you may be needing it -- moreso than usual.....get ready for it in advance.

Since God has given me the privilege to come to this sacred desk as often as I have now in almost two decades, I don't hesitate to lay bare my soul to you, discreetly or otherwise. I'm going to do it now, again.

> ...I wish I would have taken time to prepare myself when I sat down to a Sunday dinner last July. Let me tell you about it. He was a nine-year old. He began to pout. He became fidgity, uncooperative. He exasperated his grandmother, and when I saw what he was doing to her he tried my patience. We had a guest at the dinner table, a guest from back here in Silver Spring. Little did I realize at the time -- I should have thought of it ahead of time -- that triggered all kinds of thoughts for him. Bless his soul, that nine-year old at that dinner table was succumbing to a homesickness. His brother, his father and his mother were all on Tent Troupe out in Illinois. He hadn't seen

> them for three weeks, and a bit of homesickness had set in.....to the day I die I'll rue the fact that I lost my temper, and I rebuked him -- in front of our guest. He left the table and went to the bedroom and sobbed out his heart.....

....if only as we made the necessary preparation for that meal foodwise I might have made the necessary preparation soul-wise, that the set of my soul could have been that no matter how he might have tried our patience, I would have been better equal to it.

So I say to you, come that Christmas dinner, sure your table will be spread beautifully, and the cloth will be spotless, and it could be that within five minutes after you sit down that a five-year-old will spill a glass of milk.....so what! Make the necessary preparation, I beg you - -

> ...It's better to eat vegetables with people
> you love than to eat the finest meat where
> there is hostility, where there is tension.....

And would you believe it, this is the tenor, this is the quality -- this is the substance of the sermon that I preach to you as realistically as I can on the Sunday next before Christmas.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Christmas Eve December 24, 1975

"WHAT TO GIVE?"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Tell me, this Christmas, which is it -- the giving or the getting? There is a difference, you know. And the acid test will come when you look at those gifts under the Christmas tree. Where will your eye linger longer - - on the gift that bears your name, or the gift that you particularly put there for somebody else?

When I was a youngster going to church I had a very high and good regard for my pastor. When I found myself on occasion talking back to him (under my breath, of course -- he never knew it) - - it usually happened at that particular point in the worship service when with a measure of aplomb he reached for the offering plates and then gave them to the ushers as they were about to go out to the congregation.....and he always said the same thing: "It is more blessed to give then to receive"....

.....I used to say to myself, I don't believe it! For as a youngster I was far more excited about getting than giving, and especially so at Christmas time. The gifts that meant most to me were the gifts that I got. Honestly now.

But of course older people conditioned me that way, really they did. Because as I look back I also remember that for the most part when people would talk to me about Christmas, they would say to me, "Raymond, what do you want Santa to bring you?" They conditioned me to think in terms of getting. I don't recall very many people, honestly now, asking me, "What are you going to give your mother for Christmas this year?" I don't recall very many people encountering me and saying, "Can I go with you to find something to give to your

dad for Christmas this year". . . " what are you going to give your brothers and sisters?" As a child growing up, as I remember it, and I tell it to you exactly as I remember it - - - "Raymond, what do you want for Christmas this year? What do you think Santa is going to bring you?" So I didn't have much of a track record, you see, on this whole business of believing that it's more blessed to give than to receive.

But God did. And Christmas, you know, is God's idea. And that's how it all began. Because He laid down the eternal principles that it is more blessed to give than to receive. And it's well that He thought that way, because He's gotten precious little from us in return. It's a good thing He didn't stop and ask Himself, What will I get out of this? But God's not inclined to think in that way. It's put magnificently - - "God so loved . . that He gives!" And that's the way it was the first Christmas - - God abiding by the eternal principle: It's more blessed to give. And so He gave.

But now as I come to the sacred desk tonight, I ask the question: If it's more blessed to give than to receive, have you ever thought about giving to God? A blessed thing, to give God something. The question-of-questions remains: How much does Jesus Christ appear on your Christmas list?

Not long after I began my ministry in that church in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania, we established the little Chapel of the Good Shepherd, a beautiful place in which to be made aware of the nearness of God. I knew a measure of delight in going there frequently for my private devotions. And I remember going there the first Christmas we had the Little Chapel of the Good Shepherd -- on Christmas Day in the morning. And much to my surprise I discovered that somebody had been there ahead of me. And there on the altar was an envelope. And on that envelope was a child's handwriting, and these were the words that appeared in that childish handwriting: "Happy birthday, dear Jesus." That's what I found one Christmas Day in the morning, and inside the envelope, a dollar bill. Bless her soul, she had thought to give Jesus something.

But what can you give to someone who has everything? That's what we say about God, you know - - God has everything. What can you give to someone who already has everything? Would you understand if I were to tell you that Winifred and I have been blessed through the years with wonderful friends, and you, of course, are numbered among them. And we try to love all of them equally. But in our friends that God has given us through the years we have a millionaire and his wife. Now when Christmas comes, can you picture our dilemma - - what can you give a millionaire for Christmas, a man and woman who presumably already have everything that they could need or want? And if they don't have it they have the money by which to get it. What can you give someone who already has everything?

This sermon tonight bears the title: "What To Give?" And the text, as you might well know, is from that familiar passage, the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, the 11th verse - - talking about those three givers (we say three) who when they came to Mary and Joseph and the Child, they worshipped Him, and opened their treasures and presented unto Him gifts -- gold, frankincense and myrrh.....out of their treasures they gave to the King.

Out of our treasures, can we give to Jesus Christ? I suggest to you we can. I suggest to you that we can give to Jesus Christ the things that are precious to Him because He made them precious to us....

> ....when Jesus was here on earth He spent a great deal of His time just going around talking with people. He spoke the truth - - in fact He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Now Jesus is no longer here on earth. But God still wants done the things that Jesus did. That's why we have the church. Now would you believe me if I were to tell you that God, to all intents and purposes, is quite helpless in His world when it comes to getting things done. The only help He gets is from people

who think of Him, and want to give Him something....

So, what can I give Him?

Speaking for you and for me - - I can give Him my voice. I can speak the truth as He wants it spoken. This world of ours is desperately in need of people who will speak the truth. You know how miserable we've become as a nation quite recently, because we had people who lied. They didn't know what it was to speak the truth. They allowed themselves to drift around in various shades of gray, and they twisted things much to their own liking. God needs people today who can speak the truth.

I once heard a man say God needs preachers who can speak the truth -- decisively -- convincingly. He said, "As far as our congregation is concerned, we really need a one-handed preacher - - I'm sick and tired of our preacher standing up in the pulpit and saying, 'well, on the one hand this, and on the other hand this - - ' Let's have a man who goes to the sacred desk and who says, 'Thus says the Lord' - precisely - - the truth proclaimed as God puts it in his heart." God can use today people who will speak the truth.

God needs people who with their voices will speak the truth winsomely, kindly, graciously. When Jesus Christ was here on earth, He also knew that measure of delight in going around talking with people, being kind to them, giving them encouragement, drawing out the best in them.

God needs people who can speak the truth in love. I've known people who lives have been changed just because of what some people said to them. You know how you've said it yourself - - somebody spoke an encouraging word to you, and what have you said - - - "You've made my day!" I share this with you from my counseling experience.....as he left my study one time he turned to me and he said, "Pastor, I think our marriage could have been saved if only <u>once</u> she would have said to me, 'My, that's a nice necktie you're wearing tonight.'" .....and on the other hand, I hear the echo of a woman who said, "Our marriage could have been so much brighter and better if only once he would have told me

it was a decent meal." The world is desperately in need of people who can use their voices to speak the truth and to speak graciously to one another. What ruin has come upon us by people who have spoken cynically, sarcastically, and who have ridiculed us!

What can I give Him?

Give Him something He needs - - my voice. A few years back in this parish I ministered to a family, precious, indeed precious, who labored for years ministering to someone in their family who had lost his voice because of a stroke. "If only once again," she used to say to me, "I could hear him call my name -- if only to bawl me out!" A voice is something to be cherished and treasured.

My hands . . . . your hands -- they're precious. They are to be cherished. When our Lord was here on earth He placed a high value on His hands, didn't He? He worked in the carpenter's shop, He did an honest day's work. He took pride in what He did. The greater part of His life He spent working with His hands. You've heard it said to me - - 'They don't make things like they used to make them.' If only people could take pride in their workmanship. The world is desperately in need of people who will let their hands do an honest task. But you say to yourself, I'm not a carpenter, I'm not a craftsman, I'm not a sculptor. Alright, you aren't. But God gave you hands to be kept busy, doing things that only can be done by your hands! Just as I come to this sacred desk Sunday after Sunday with awe and with reverence, you have a right to know it - - there's a prayer on my lips: "O Lord, open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise." These hands of mine - - do you think for a second when I hold a baby in the crook of my arms and reach for water to sprinkle upon his head and to name him for Jesus Christ, that I do not recognize what a precious thing it is to take a pair of hands and to use them in blessing? What can I give Him? - - what He needs. He has no hands but my hands, your hands.

When our Blessed Lord was here on earth He gave Himself completely to doing the will of His Heavenly Father. In fact He said, "My meet is to do the

will of Him who sent me." And in the last chapter of His life that He wrote, on bended knee He said, "Not my will but Yours be done" - - He gave Himself perfectly, completely. He gave Himself. When we confirm youngsters here in Saint Luke Church we have them come up to the altar, almost individually we say to them: "Do you love the Lord Jesus and do you promise to serve Him through His Holy Church?" And the answer that's given, "Yes, with my whole heart." -- with everything that I have, that's what the answer means. As Jesus Christ served His Heavenly Father with all that He had, so God expects us, if we will turn to Him, to give our hearts to Him. The world is desperately in need of people who will commit themselves completely into the hand of God.

Dwight L. Moody, God bless his soul, used to say, "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man totally committed to Him, and by the grace of God I'm going to be that man!" I never cease to marvel at the kind of good that's let loose in this parish by people who give themselves freely into the hand of God.....who give themselves.

There were some youngsters who were going to visit in an old people's home, and they set themselves a schedule, and they said, this week we'll take this kind of a package, and we'll take this kind of a basket full of presents, and then another week we'll take some other presents"....and they kept lining up for themselves the things that they were going to take. And then one day one wit observed, "What do you think would happen if sometime when we went to visit we took nothing but ourselves?" Now I think I should tell you this - - Winifred and I have reached the stage with our millionaire friends when there isn't much that we can give them ...except a telephone call, or a letter that we write. Just to show them that we love them -- not for what they have, but for what they are. And in that way we give something of ourselves.

Now with 1976 just around the corner, how about a New Year's resolution -- to let our lips speak truth graciously....to let our hands be laid to a useful task

that brings honor and glory to God, and to let all that we are be dedicated to Him.....

"What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part.
What can I give Him? I'll give Him my heart."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
Christmas Eve (6:30 p.m. service) December 24, 1975

"CHRISTMAS IS NOW"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The title for this brief meditation on this night that marks the Holy Nativity is emblazoned on the bulletin that you have in your hand: "Christmas Is Now" - - and the text is from the Gospel for this night:

> "For unto you is born this day in the
> city of David a saviour, which is
> Christ the Lord."

Whether you care to admit it or not, one does have his moment when he has to say that as far as God is concerned, it's now or never. Maybe that's the way the shepherds felt that night. It came to them quite unexpectedly -- they were surprised, they were awestruck. But then the angels were singing just for them, so it seemed. And what they heard they heard exactly as it was meant to be heard: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a saviour which is Christ the Lord." And then the response.

When God speaks, God expects us to respond. And they did! Without any hesitation, they were agreed. The Good Book says they said one to another: "Let us now go unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass." We call the others the wise men, but I say to you with all the strength that my soul can command now - - the shepherds, too, deserve to be called the wise ones. For they were the ones who took the voice from Heaven at its word. When will you and I ever learn to take God at His word? When will we ever get to the point where we will believe Him....completely...and without any measure of hesitation at all?

Ponder the significance of this: it was news the like of which they had never heard before. It was news, wonderful news! The kind of news that earth

could not give....the kind of news that could come to them only out of this world.....the kind of news that they were not accustomed to hearing. But when God speaks, happy indeed is the person who takes God at His word. And they were the wise ones, who without any hesitation, without any reluctance whatsoever, they said one to another, "Let's go, and let's see what God has planned for us." It was then, it was precisely in that present day.

One of the lamentable things about most of us is this: we're putting off thinking that some good thing will come to us later on. Well, we live by anticipation, and happy indeed is the man who allows himself to believe it. And to a certain degree, with God the best is always yet to come. But that is not to mean that we should fail to claim what God is giving us today, in the present moment.

Some people make the mistake of thinking that all the wonderful things that God ever did, He did in the past. And there are some people who imprison God in the past. They look back to the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and they say, those were the good old days, when people lived by the Ten Commandments, when people came as a multitude and sat at the feet of Jesus Christ... when the multitudes heard Him gladly. But where are the multitudes today? -- who hear Jesus Christ gladly? Where are the people who believe in this our day that He relates to our generation? There are those who lament and say for many today Jesus Christ is complete irrelevant. So they look back and they say, <u>those</u> were the days, when God was active, when God could do a day's work and people would applaud.

Or there are others who live for the millenium that is yet to come, and they put off believing and claiming all the treasury which God reveals and opens to them today because they believe that not until <u>then</u> will God in all His glory appear. Well I happen to believe, and earnestly so, that if God is forever, then He's been in the past - - but He doesn't stay in the past.....if God is forever, then surely He's in the future - - but His blessings will not be with-

held until some far-off day - - if God is forever, then that means He is now. We are able to tap His resources -- today. One of the saddest things to be said about Christians is that they fail to take God seriously in the availability of all of His resources in the present moment. As then God who says to us through Jesus Christ: "I will never forsake you" - - and then to underline it completely He says, "I am with you now . . I am with you always." We long for peace. We think that some day we will have peace. But Jesus Christ says, "My peace . .

...not,"I gave to you . . "

...not, "My peace I will give to you . . "

Christ says, "My peace I give to you" - - now.

I come to this sacred desk tonight to tell you that Christmas is now. Some 22 years ago I had the good fortune to go to the land that gave us Christmas. I went out to the shepherd's fields. I went at night. The sky was a midnight blue, bespeckled with stars. The air was as cool and crisp as tonight's. There was a mystifying silence that was broken only with the barking of dogs in the distance. And then I quieted my mind and I hushed my heart, and I said, "For shame upon you! You think you're standing here trying to think of something that happened two thousand years ago!" And I took my soul to task, and I said, it's happening now. God is coming to me all over again - - God is coming to me in this present moment.

When I began my ministry, one of England's greatest preachers was Leslie Dl Weatherhead - - he has since retired. He has written a number of books that have been read by a good many people here in the States, and for a number of years he was the distinguished preacher of the City Temple in London. He used to tell about going to visit a woman who had a great sorrow...one whom she loved had been taken away from her. And she could never quite make the adjustment. Alongside of her was a daughter who was trying her level best to comfort her. Dr. Weatherhead was making pastoral calls and he stopped at her

home. He knocked at the door, he was ushered in...he saw the two of them there. And before he could speak a single word the bereaved railed out against him. She said, "I used to go to hear you preach -- you used to talk about a God who loves us -- you used to talk about a God who would protect us -- you used to talk about a God who would comfort us - - well, where is your God now? Where are His comforting arms in this present moment?" Dr. Weatherhead was a wise and good man, and equal by the grace of God to the occasion, he said to her quietly and calmly, "You want to know about the comforting arms of God? They're here -- right now! -- in the arms of your daughter who has drawn near to you in your sorrow, who has come to visit you, who is doing her best to assuage your grief." God's at work now - - today - - - - in this present moment.

Christmas, my friends, is now. Christians are the Christmas people! We know that He's already come. We know that He chooses to make our heart a Bethlehem. We used to say through Advent, "Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus. Come in . . " when? You know how it goes - - "Come in today, come in to stay. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus."

I once read about that terrible earthquake that took place in Italy. The land was devastated. A few people remained alive. Many were killed. But then one day they saw walking upon the ruins the tall, gaunt form of a Catholic priest, striding amid the ruins, holding a baby in his arms, as much as to say: "God's beginning all over again -- today -- now!" -- in the face of despair, in the face of defeat, even in the face of death.

It took a bit of doing on the part of those shepherds to believe what they heard. It was not a very blessed day in which they lived. If you think ours is a wicked generation, go back and read your history books about life in those days. But they heard a message with this word: "God has come to us -- today -- Christmas is now! Here! In this place! Where you are! Believe it, and then Christmas will be wherever you go. This I most certainly believe.

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(Transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Holy Innocents, Martyrs December 28, 1975

"THE DIFFERENCE CHRISTMAS MAKES"
(Matthew 2:11)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our Father and from His Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

I have my moments when I wish I had the time to be able to write a book regarding Scripture and to share with the readers what presumably could be a child's reaction to certain Scriptural passages. As an example, take today's text. It's recorded as the 11th verse of the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew. And it refers, of course, to the wise men.

They were warned by God to go back to their own country a different way, in order to outwit the wicked King Herod. And I suppose if I were to see through the eyes of a child this verse of Scripture, I could well imagine a child saying, "Goody for you, God -- goody for you! That's what I would have done, had I been you. I wouldn't have given the wicked King Herod a chance to hurt those precious wise men!" ...for you see, even a child could understand that a wicked king would beat them and torture them, trying to get the truth out of them as to where the King of the Jews had been born. And because they were wise and precious people, they wouldn't want to tell the wicked king about what they had seen and what they had experienced. So through the eyes of a child, perhaps: "Goody for you, God - - you did it! You outwitted them! You beat them! You didn't give them a chance to do the evil that they had in mind."

Well, God is like that. God knows our evil intentions. God knows what we'd do if we had a chance to pull it off. And every now and then God outwits us. He out-maneuvers us. For any number of reasons He just won't give us a chance to do the evil that we intend.

I'm impressed by this verse. I'm constrained to talk with you about it this morning, on the Sunday after Christmas. When you think of it, of course you think of it as a change in travel plans. They went back to their own country, traveling a different road than they had taken to get to Bethlehem. Now the title for this sermon is: "The Difference Christmas Makes." And if you read between these lines I want you to get beyond the biographical interpretation of the text and to deal with the truth that's impressed. Sure, they went back to their own country by a different route. But what's far more important, they went back differently, because they were different men.

If you were to ask me some of the lessons that life has taught me, I think I could tell you without any reluctance, one of the lessons I'm learning increasingly is this: that nothing ever is as was. It's a very simple thing. Life is always bringing to bear upon us new forces, and tomorrow in all likelihood takes us around the bend in the road to face something that we didn't face yesterday. Nothing ever is as was.

And God be praised, when the new element is introduced that makes a difference for good in our lives. And that's exactly what happened in the lives of the wise men. When they came to Bethlehem, something new was introduced into their lives -- an encounter with God. It was the fact of God because they were constrained to kneel and to worship. This happened.

And as you well know, of course you do, the searcher and the finder are different people. When you're searching for something, when you are looking for something, you are not the same person as you are once you've found it. So this is the difference that set in -- the seeker came to journey's end and found something. And that experience was God-come-to-them-in-Jesus Christ. And they returned to their own country - - differently.

You know why I'm preaching this sermon today, don't you? We've made the

journey to Bethlehem. We've been exposed to the Christmas climate. I'm reluctant to say this, but I think one has to put it this way: at Christmas-time as for no other season of the year, somehow God gets across to us in bigger and bolder and brighter terms than otherwise. Will you be sensitive to this? Will you allow it to make its rightful impression upon the fabric of your heart? Out of your own experience you know very well that in some instances the last couple of days you've risen to an occasion that otherwise you might not have arisen if it had not been that you were laid hold upon by the Christmas spirit. You did some things that ordinarily you wouldn't have done, and you did them gladly and without thought of return. That's the way God gave us Christmas, you know. Say it again: We Christians are the Christmas people, because at Christmas we were exposed to God as we were never exposed before. God was there -- specifically -- and they were aware of it.

But don't let it happen to you as it's happening to some people, that will pass through this Christmas-tide without giving God the chance to make the dent upon the fabric of their hearts . . . and almost by keeping company, to a degree at least, with the Russian cosmonaut, the first to return from a trip to outer space, and he said -- did he say it cynically or sarcastically? -- he didn't see anything of God out there. But centuries before even the day of Jesus Christ there was a spiritually sensitive Psalmist who said:

> "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the
> firmament showeth his handiwork."

God is always dealing graciously with us, providing us intimations of His nearness. Wise indeed is the man who is aware of it, because once he's aware of it a <u>difference</u> sets in.

Now what was the difference that happened there at Bethlehem? I'm going to suggest two things.

One - when they came to Bethlehem they were impressed as never before with the transcendence of God. Now bear with me, I know what I'm saying. For here

was the element of mystery - - as they knelt before a baby born to be King, they couldn't figure out why or how God could do this. And when you and I are impressed with the element of mystery in our relationship with God, something sets in in the fabric of our heart that will hold us in good stead. For shame upon many of us, and I'm always saddened when I come upon anyone who is a member of this congregation who's become so sophisticated that he no longer stands in awe of God, or who is unwilling to accept anything from God unless he himself can figure it out, or unless it seems reasonable to him. Maybe that's the arrogance which becomes man, to think that he's able to figure out the mind of God and why God does what He does and how He's able to do it.

Some of us have lived long enough to look back across the years and to thank God for the stock from which they stem. I continue to rejoice that I stem from Near-Eastern stock. My parents, now of blessed memory, taught me to accept the fact of God, with a sense of awe -- clouded with a degree of mystery . . . never to allow myself to presume that I could figure out what He was up to, but to accept the evidence of His work.

> ...they taught me, and for this I remain grateful, that there is to be this respectful distance between God and me, and I recognize the transcendence.

Part of the problem of modern man is this: that he's become so arrogant, so sophisticated, that he refuses to accept what God offers until it becomes so completely reasonable to him, or rationalistic. To the credit of these wise men, the impact was made upon them, the element of mystery was there.

After this service is over, Pastor David will take and hold in the crook of his arm a child or two and name those children for Jesus Christ. The birth of a child - - one always stands in awe of it, that it could happen as it happens, that the germ of life can be transmitted! He was a wise man indeed who every time he walked down the halls of a hospital and passed the nursery, the

crib room, he bowed his head in respect, and as he realized how the years would unfold -- the mystery that was captured in the life of every single baby.

The second thing that they discovered there in Bethlehem that made an impact upon their hearts was -- would you believe it -- just the other side of the coin. The one side is the transcendence.....the other is the fact of the incarnation -- that God would stoop to us -- that God would come to our level -- that God would reveal Himself in human form!

You know, don't you, that God's preferred way of working things out is always through a human being. When He saw fit to offer us the miracle which is Christmas, He reached for a pure woman, a Mary....He reached for a pure man, faithful and devoted, a Joseph. When He saw fit to fulfill for us the redemptive deed, He reaches for that carpenter's son. God's preferred instrument is always a human being. And this left its dent upon the souls of wise men as they encountered God.

Some people, you see, think God only works except through the earthquake, the wind and the fire, but not until they realize that here, through a human being, God comes to us, and in that Babe of Bethlehem as He came through no other human being. And you realize this, and it makes a difference, I say to you.

Now let's get back to the text again. Once the difference set in, did they stay there and bask in the glory of it? They beheld the glory of God as they had never seen it before, but they couldn't stay there. They had to go back to their own country. And I'm willing to suggest to you they had to go back where there was hostility, where there was tension, where there was unbelief, where there was insensitivity.

And there are some of you, I know very well, who live for the hour that you have in Saint Luke Church. It's a shameful thing not to call by the rightful name what actually happens here. There are people, some of you, who live

for the hour that you spend in this place, each Lord's Day. But you can't stay here. You've got to go back, and walk in the midst of unbelievers -- to deal with those who are insensitive, to minister to those who ridicule the fact of God, who speak cynically of what the church stands for. You've got to go back. It's the same country, but when you go back, you go back differently . . . because you're a Christmas person who beheld the face of Jesus Christ.

One of the books that I want to read again in 1976 is one that was written almost fifty years ago by Walter Lippmann, back in 1929, "A Preface To Morals" ....and back there Walter Lippmann is lamenting the fact that people were giving up belief in God. They just couldn't get themselves to believe the Christmas story, as an example. They called it a fable, a myth, a dream. But, said he, there were those who believed it. It gave a sense of order and dignity and purpose to their lives. Lippmann laments in that book that when people no longer believed it they lost something, and they went following, as he puts it in a very cleverly-turned phrase: "They went after the notion, yet remaining unfulfilled."

Before the first service this morning someone handed me this. I'm constrained to read it for you. It's called "Courage." Maybe it's not exactly the way you would have written it or -the way you would say it, but give it a chance to make its point. . . . .

"Go back in your mind to a long time ago,
And try to imagine these events as they happened;
Pretend to yourself that you are for a while,
A young teenage girl, huge with child,
Riding days on a donkey, mile after mile,
Pondering a while what her family must think,
The remarks of her friends, and the neighborhood men as they drink.
How her heart must hurt, along with the joy,
As she carried within her God's little Boy.
Now picture a young man by her side every mile,
Dusty with walking, a tender worried smile.

He surely is what honor and bravery are about,
To take her as his bride, without a doubt,
To know she carries a child, not of his making,
Public opinion he withstood, his faith unshaking.
How his friends must have ribbed him -- things
aren't so this day.
Would you have the courage to walk in his way?

The journey is over, thousands cram the street,
Hotels are filled; there's no retreat.
To a stable a man leads them, with lots of fresh hay.
Poor Mary, so weary, a soft place to lay;
Poor Joseph, so worried -- animals at her feet,
The cattle in with them continue to eat.

Her labor begins, and think for a while
Of a frightened young girl about to have her first child.
In a stable for cattle, on a bed of hay,
In a city of strangers, her parents far away.
Would you have the courage to do that today?

The baby was born, and as He lay on the hay,
A star over Bethlehem turned night into day:
Angels descended and sang the glad tidings afar,
In other countries wise man started to follow
the star.
The mother and the Boy were surrounded by light,
Angels from Heaven stood in plain sight . . .
This story is told every year, and I pray,
That you have the courage to believe it today."

The wise men had the courage to believe it,

and they went back.....differently.

And that's what Christmas is all about. It was God's idea to make a difference.

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(This sermon transcribed as recorded)